

# the wonder of being

a compilation of 'letters to my friends' written at the end of  
the 20<sup>th</sup> century, brought up to date in the first half of 2011

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## ***Introduction***

Progress, one of our favorite words these days means, for instance, that computers get faster, supplied with an ever new and better operating system. Unfortunately that also means that what I wrote a little more than ten years ago is gone because the word processing program I used does not work any more on any of the new operating systems; it does not even exist any more. I saved the files, but it took much work, using an old laptop that had an operating system now four newer ones behind. That computer with the “old” OS could only read those even older files in a relatively new program that copied the words, but not the formatting. Then from that program to a modern program got the text, but with some omissions and changes. Making those ancient (ten years old) files readable has taken me many years of work.

During the last decennium of the last century these were letters that I printed in many copies and sent through the mail to at first 50 and eventually many more email friends. People who had written or phoned me that they liked an early book. I tried to print in smaller fonts, closer together, to save paper and weight, trying to keep the prints and envelopes below one ounce. Many months it was just barely under. Originally this collection was called *A Book of Miracles*, the miracles of nature and those of my daily life. I haven’t changed my own attitude to *being* or to nature but the world certainly has changed these last ten years. Our thinking seems to have moved to two, three, or more extremes. My writing has become more extreme also, I think sometimes. When I finally got back to these letters written some—many would say many—years ago I was surprised with how well it said what I still feel, think, see, in what I call the realities of today.

I must have changed less than the times.

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# #1

We, humans, are not the same people we were even half a century ago. We look different: in many parts of the world people are taller because there is more food; even half a century ago there were fewer men and women who looked as pumped up and energized as today's Americans. Anabolic steroids, 'scientific' body shaping, surgical enhancements and our intense need to look super, have changed us. More striking is the way our senses and our thinking have changed as a result of technology. We have become insensible.

After Ella Fitzgerald's death music sellers brought out several catalogs of new/old releases. I acquired two Ella CDs. One day, when I was admiring the tone of her voice I became aware of the quality of 'being real' that came through my only medium hi-fi system. She was in the room. Ella crooned to me, hardly raising her voice but with inflections and vibratos that do not exist in ordinary voices (not electronically 'mixed'). And suddenly, I saw a little slice of the change that happened almost unnoticed in this century.

At some point in the development of sound as a commodity someone created a microphone, which over time became smaller and better, so that it was put on a stick. Now singers can sing into an instrument, rather than into the air of a theatre or concert hall, hoping the acoustics would allow at least most of the listeners to hear. Not that long ago, any singer, anywhere, who wanted to be heard at a public performance had to work hard to 'project' her voice, to strengthen and control the volume so that her/his voice would be strong enough to fill a large hall. Then, suddenly, singers need not sing to an audience any more, they can sing into a piece of plastic, which converts electrical pulses and 'adjust' them for effect.

When a singer does not have to be concerned about the volume of her/his voice, s/he can pay attention to other qualities of the music or to the poetry of the lyrics. We hear their voices whispered in our ears, without background noises. Today's music has qualities humans literally never could hear before.

What have we, humans, become? I wonder where this is going. All the changes, technological as well as cultural, religious, scientific have moved in the same direction — away from the unitary view we had of ourselves as part of a whole, part of nature. When we decide that there is I and there is an 'other', we choose a path... On this path we are farther than ever away from feeling any kind of connection with nature other than as something we use to feed and entertain us. I find that I cannot live comfortably in a world where all I am supposed to see is that I and the trees outside, and my neighbor, and the dog next door, are different. I feel fortunate to be able to perceive the world around me as part of me and I am part of it. I am part of the All, as we all are. Trees and I are made of the same molecules, even the same DNA. All breathe the same air, drink the same water, are part of the same earth.

Some people say that way of seeing is spiritual. What's in a word? To me it is the way it is. I believe that we all can see the way of oneness, it is an ancient heritage. And ultimately, I think we would be a lot happier and the earth itself would be able to heal itself if we could remember to see in the way of oneness.

In my world magic happens.

# welcome to my world

A few weeks ago I planted a lemon tree. I can sense that she is happy and content to be here (I do not know why this lemon tree is a she. It is a grafted tree and it is the root stock, I think, that is a she.

This island is dancing with the complex energies of life in its many forms, and it is all so young (geologically!), so new, that it has not learned to evolve slowly.

The ecology where I live is called alpine. Because of the altitude (4000 ft) it is not very tropical, considerably cooler than at sea level, although of course the difference between the length of days in summer and winter is very small, because we are so close to the equator. We have very thin soil but lots of moisture: a world of green mists sliding through grey veils, and an abundance of life force bursting through all dimensions, quite undisciplined as yet.

Imported plant species thrive on this exuberant energy, sometimes shouldering aside species who were here before, but always adding color and sap to this little world.



One of our newspapers screamed at us, recently:

**LIFE ON MARS..?** “Scientists discover there may have been life on Mars and...”

Of course there is life on Mars! Why is anyone surprised? Life is the essence of the universe. Life must be everywhere.

Somehow, in this age, in this country, in this language, we have misused some words so much that we do not see clearly any more what they mean. ‘Life’ can be ‘all living things on earth’ (and we can be surprised that there is life somewhere else — why should we be unique?.

Or life can mean ‘my life’, which we, here in America, think of as a time and a quality that is added to the matter that is my body. Our thinking is that I ‘have’ a body, which is a thing, a possession, to which is added something, ‘life’ (a sort of energy source?), which rides in the body until the body gives out, or is killed, or dies...

Or ‘life’ can be used for all kinds of concepts, for instance ‘night life’, ‘life in these times’, ‘the life of an explorer’... And it can mean Life, with a capital L, meaning a sort of holy gift bestowed by God, which therefore is so unique and incredible and unbelievably wonderful that it is obviously better and greater and more important than any other life (with a small L) that might reside in animals or plants.

Because we think ourselves so special, we feel alone. We feel scared, powerless victims — unless we talk ourselves into feeling strong and ruthless and violent and ‘successful’.

Of course, ‘life’ is only one of the words we have laden with so many different meanings that the word hardly means anything any more, or, it means different things to different people.

Some time ago I devised a little test that I apply to figure out whether things are really important. I tell it in its simplest form. I imagine that when it is time for me to leave this plane, I first go to St. Peter who stands at some sort of gate. When he asks me... have you been good, my boy — as Santa Claus does. Or perhaps he will ask... what good deeds have you done down there? But, no, he won’t have to ask questions, he already knows. It is all written down in the

Book he consults (now of course computerized).

I cannot believe that there is any mention in that Book of the times that I felt scared, alone and sorry for myself as victim. I do not think there is any mention either of moments when I felt fierce, or successful. I cannot imagine that the books records times and occasions when I have ‘sinned’ (had sex). Frankly, the only thing I can imagine being written there is how much — and how — I have loved. From that perspective the story of my life is much shorter than an account of all the things I have done or seen or studied. To me it seems the only importance of my life in this life (see how confusing that word is?) must be, How have I loved?

Many people do not have my test, I have noticed. They really do believe they are here to suffer. They think it is important to do the ‘right’ things (and, ‘right’ is another of those words that means different things to different people). Some say it is the culture that makes us do what we did — forgetting that we are the ones who make the culture, certainly we do our darndest to not change a thing, and preferably keep things the way things were in our grandparents days.

To me I cannot imagine that Life is not everywhere. I find it very difficult to believe that we, humans, are so totally and utterly unique in the whole universe that there is no Life anywhere else. Me, I am curious about what form life might take somewhere else — might have taken on Mars, or still takes on Mars. And how can we recognize different forms and shapes of life on other planets and—who knows—in deep space? There is so much glittering and shimmering life all around us, all the time, even in the dark! Life is!

Every now and then I go to the desert, near here, and I wander on a narrow path staked out in black lava congealed in tortured and dangerous shapes. I look in dark cracks, explore holes in empty parched blacknesses, and I see that tell-tale green shimmer of the first lichen, or even a tiny leaf of a minuscule plant that has found enough water and crumbs of nurture to start yet another form of Life. Its tiny roots may eventually break open the dark lava, and over the years it becomes fertile soil.

Of course there is life on Mars, life is everywhere!



**Once**, twenty years ago, maybe a few more, I was in the Philippines. My work was demanding and the only way to relax and have some time for myself was to get away from Manila. So I found myself in the northern part of Luzon. I had heard about a tribe of people, called Igorot, who I wanted to meet. There was something wild and fierce about these people that came through in the stories told (they were supposed to be, or have been, cannibals! Brrr...

I was in the area where these mysterious people were known to live, so I asked where one could find these people? Nobody really knew, but they knew that they lived further north, on both sides of the highway, but mostly on the east side. Maybe half an hour later (I was at a party) a little man came up to me and almost whispered ‘they come to the 30 mark’. It took me a few moments to figure out what he meant, The people you asked about come to the 30th kilometer marker, going north on the highway. When I turned to thank him, he had disappeared. Not too far out of town, I thought.

The next morning I inquired about buses going north, but it seems the only bus for the day

had already left very early that morning. It had been very crowded anyway. Nobody knew when there might be another bus. Why don't you take a taxi someone suggested.

I walked to the taxi stand, just a short way from the bus station. There was only one car. Yes, he would be willing to take me anywhere I wanted. How far did we have to go? To the 30 mark, I said. The driver quoted a price, I paid half up front, and we were off.

After about twenty minutes careening around wild corners on a breath-taking road, the driver turned around to ask me where, exactly, around the 30 mark. Was there a house, a little roadside shop where he could wait for me? I did not know myself. Just go to the 30 mark I said. He shrugged his shoulders. Shortly we stopped in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by steep mountains on all sides, and not a sign of human presence. After looking at me strangely, the driver quickly turned around and drove off.

It was still early morning, no later than 8am. It was quite chilly (for the Tropics) and I congratulated myself on the foresight to bring a windproof jacket and sturdy shoes. Only a few minutes later I saw a man climbing up just above the 30 mark, stand on the road, listen and look with great concentration, then looking up to where I was standing. Behind him another man came up and went through the same concentrated attention to the environment. Eventually there were five men. We could not talk with each other, but sign language and a few words of Tagalog got across that, No, I was not lost, not in trouble, I came to see them. Two of the men started walking in the direction of the town I had just left. The other three motioned me to follow them. We took off on a steep path that led deep into a valley. From there up an equally steep path to a ridge, from where we had a panoramic view of half the province of Luzon, I imagined. Steep mountains and equally steep valleys in endless perspective in all directions.

The three men and I had 'talked' a bit, as we walked and occasionally rested. They told me they were returning to their village, which we would reach that same evening. OK, they asked? Sure, that would be fine. When I left the hotel this morning, I told them that I might be gone 'a day or so...'

After another valley and another crest, we came down a path, as steep as previous ones, but very dry. We walked, cautiously, over a slope of loose scree, when I slipped.

I am not sure how many feet, or meters, I fell, but my slide loosened a lot of stones that fell alongside me.

I landed at the bottom, with my feet planted in a knee-high mound of stones, my hands seeking support from the last sliding stones. I was unhurt, except for some nasty scrapes on the inside of both hands, scrapes that looked raw and dirty. There was very little bleeding (it would have been if it was bleeding, which would at least wash some of the dirt out). I did not see any water anywhere near. I knew that I should attend to the hands immediately. I was in the middle of nowhere, I had no first aid kit with me. My eyes were drawn to some plants nearby. And I mean 'drawn'; I felt as if someone moved my head, forcing me to look in that direction.

I could not identify the plant, but it felt 'good', familiar. Somehow I 'knew' that I had to chew its leaves to make a poultice. I also knew what the leaves would taste like in my mouth (bitter), and that the taste would activate my own saliva to flow copiously (yes, yes, yes).

The three men had found their way down without hurting themselves. They now stood around me, looking at what I was doing. I chewed leaves, making a very wet poultice, which I smeared on the palms of my hands. When I had covered one hand with a thick paste, one of the men handed me a long leaf which I wrapped around the hand. Eventually I had both hands wrapped in awkward, clumsy clumps of leaves.

Late afternoon we reached the little village high on another steep mountain side. One of the men who had brought me here told the villagers (no more than 10 people, I think) that I had

been waiting for them on the highway — which made everyone look at me curiously. Then he told them about my scrapes, and what I had done. They all

stood around me, craning to see, when I carefully removed the now tattered leaves exposing a dried out mess that had been a poultice. Someone reached out cupped hands. I carefully put the leafy messes in his hands. The palms of my hands were completely clean, rosy and healthy looking, obviously not infected, and even where pieces of skin had hung that morning, was now new skin. There was no infection.

The next day the three men and at least half of the people in the village escorted me back to town (along a much shorter route). I slept in a bed again that night.

I learned (again) that when I needed to, I could ‘sense’ what the qualities of a plant are, and how it could heal me.



We have made the Earth our own, nothing is sacred, all is changed to our whims. In earlier days the human world was a part like other parts of what we found around us. Humans trod lightly. Today’s man-made world is apart and the globe little more than real estate, and the minerals and metals we think ours to do with to ‘make things’. And so we are drowning in things we cannot get rid of any more, while our spirit is wasting away.

When we cut ourselves off from nature we found ourselves alone, sorry for ourselves, fearful and angry. What we created, the institutions, governments, bureaux, departments of this and that, have in common that they are based on the fundamental idea that humans are ‘hard to manage’, stupid, rebellious, and incapable of acting rationally (or ‘properly’, whatever that meant to whoever made that rule). “For our own good”, the experts tell us: for our health, for our safety, our protection, our happiness, for... Have we painted ourselves in a corner?

When we lost our sense that we were part of nature, we built structures, originally thought to protect us from the chaos of nature, I think, but now serving to control us, its creators. We built cages within cages, busily strengthening the bars when we found that things do not run too well any more, the system creaks and groans from overload and cross purposes.

What the rulers and those who enforce the rules do not know is that the more rules you make, the more rules are broken. A simple law of nature (any organism has defenses) as well as a law of reason. How can we tell the rulers that their way does not work? The worst of it is, of course, that we are so battered and confused ourselves that most of us can no longer see what is happening with the rules and rulers. We do not want to know. It is too scary to confront a monstrous Frankenstein we created.

Our lives are so hedged about with barricades and barriers, fences and walls that are supposed to protect us but in fact constrict us, that we feel helpless, powerless to change the rules and rulers we ourselves created. The machine is stuck in a groove, any and all problems are automatically approached with more controls. More enforcers,



more jails, more laws to control the control, and so on endlessly. Of course more controls make more problems, and...

Yes, we have painted ourselves in a corner.

When one is stuck, as we are stuck in the house we built, the only way out is using what is called 'lateral thinking'. Lateral thinking is something like martial arts. Don't butt your head against the same wall again, step sideways.

For instance, how would a visitor from Mars look at us? What would he see? —**A beautiful world in two colors?** (our visitor of course sees color differently than we do). —**There is a lot going on down there** (the visitor has a different sense of time; for the visitor time is 'slower' compared to how we experience time so the Martian sees things down here happening rapidly). —**There is a lot of sickness down there** (the Martian visitor's sense organs cannot distinguish what we call 'individuals', our visitor sees only species. What the visitor calls sickness is an affliction that effects whole species—some, in fact, are obviously dying out—**That is a voracious (species) down there that is causing havoc... strange, it is also the that is most 'sick'.**

The Martian visitor goes through his First Aid kit to see what she might use to treat the sickest (species) first, before even trying to rescue some of the weak and dying ones. While the friendly Martian is looking through her First Aid kit we may be able to assist him.

Now that 'the problem' has magically transformed itself from a 'stuck situation' to a sickness, it requires a whole different kind of thinking. How then do we deal with our situation as a disease, a sickness? Go to a doctor and... No. Stop! This is a different dimension. Here there are no categories from the stuck world. Just healers, shamans and magicians — no doctors. How do such healers deal with disease? What needs to be healed is the spirit, then the body will heal itself. In our stuck world the spirit has been starved because we denied it. By emphasizing that things that cannot be measured are not true, or real, we lost the ability to even recognize spirit when it shows itself.

Healers of the spirit send strong healing energy to those who need it. That is what we all can do. Radiate unconditional love to ourselves and our neighbors, near and far, forming a healing circle that will have powerful effects. Once our species is on the way to normalcy and health, today's 'problems' will also be healing.

Let's do some sick room magic! (Can you feel the love I am sending with this letter?)



When the sun comes through, as it does this minute, the darks I thought black, now assert themselves as browns and a flash of dark blue, and always green. Light itself is green here, even the mottled brown bark of 'ohi'as trees has a green sheen. There are spiders and cobwebs everywhere. And pure white butterflies that catch long rides on the wind. This world is a magical place!



A gentle breeze and the sun low on the horizon shows everywhere spider threads glisten and shimmer, as if magic is making visible the subtle energy lines that flow between trees and the house. I look out from my little porch in awe. So much light almost blinds me.

Occasionally I tell people that ‘with age, my hearing is getting less acute’. That is only partly true. It is also true that with age I sift sounds differently. Of all the noise that is happening around us, a small portion reaches our consciousness — as only a small portion of what our eyes pick up, reaches the center where those signals are being translated into ‘seeing’. Something inside our skull quickly runs through information from all our senses coming in and ‘chooses’ what is to be routed to awareness. Usually we are not aware of that process going on.

Between what my ears pick up and hearing, incredible complexities happen, chemical signals, neurological signals, and who knows what else. With age one learns to have a hand in that process. I have learned to ‘tune out’. Maybe it is too much effort to follow two or three conversations, or to listen to what is at the edge of my hearing. Or I tune out conversations I hear in a foreign language. I tune out what I think is unpleasant, or shocking or scary, or boring. I turn out the noise of bulldozers and cars; I hear them but pay them no attention and don’t let them interfere with a bird call.

Selective hearing also allows me to hear some sounds better. Near the edge of my garden are some tall ‘ohi’a trees. They are ‘talking trees’. They are tall and thin, and close enough to rub against each other when conditions are just right. And, strangely, the ‘talk’ is never quite the same, sometimes high, sometimes low, sometimes a single cry, sometimes a whole phrase. And almost human-sounding... When I show these talking trees to visitors, they seem surprised: they had not noticed. Some cannot hear them.

I also listen to sounds made by grasses, leaves, and branches. And, miraculous as it seems to me, I can hear the tiniest sounds over the now always present ‘rushing’ in my ears...

I am perfecting selective seeing, and selective feeling. Somewhat more difficult than selective hearing, but well worth the effort. By paying attention I have become much better at seeing what is at the edge of vision. And where before it was an effort to see what some people call auras, I have discovered now I have a ‘switch’, which, when I turn it on, allows me to see auras all the time. When I try to ‘explain’ that in western terms, the best I can do is say that auras are wavelengths just on the other side of the visible spectrum. Or maybe they are in another dimension. In any way... I assure you, auras are real! Of course it is important to always expect a miracle, otherwise you may miss it

## #2

Early morning. The day is barely born, unformed yet. No wind, no rain, no sunshine. Like a newborn babe, this day is nothing but possibilities and expectations.

From my desk I see an 'olapa, a tree known for its nervous leaves that twitch and shiver in the slightest breeze. In Southeast Asia twitching leaves are said to be brushed by a passing spirit — an 'olapa tree must be the home of spirits! Today, with bright sun above, the radiant green of the 'olapa shimmers flashes of silver. An imported pine tree on the left shows a much darker green, a flat green, without highlights or shades. Tree ferns of course are yet another green, metallic with a touch of blue at times, when they get old they turn bronze, gold, or even shiny black at times.

Of course all around are 'ohi'a trees, one of the few indigenous plant species in Hawai'i, often the first to grow in lava. 'Ohi'as are tough! They can live for a long time without growing much, if they have to. Since there is not much soil around here yet, trees sometimes topple in a strong wind. When 'ohi'as fall over they usually continue to grow at right angles. They also make air roots. That seems like insurance to me: in case they need it, they can quickly make a second trunk, or continue to grow in another direction. 'Ohi'as grow in tree ferns (and tree ferns grow in 'ohi'as). Usually 'ohi'as are slow growing—but they are survivors!

I feel what I call 'life force' around them very strongly.

Note: I am using the proper Hawaiian spelling for these plant names. The single 'smart quote' (in English called a glottal stop, in Hawaiian 'okina) sounds like the sort of hiccup in the middle of our expression: Oh'Oh... So, 'ohi'a is pronounced, ohee..ah

'Ohi'as used to be one of only a few species growing here, maybe that is why they show in one plant all the color and variety that nature lavishes on a mixed tropical forest. 'Ohi'as have dark green leaves, or a lighter green or silvery leaves, reddish leaves; new leaves are a dull white, or pink, rust red. Lehua, the fire engine red pompoms that are the 'ohi'a's flowers, seem fragile, but are tough as the tree.

Of course, lehua is the flower of Madame Pele. Hawaiians know not to pick lehua blossoms, because it surely will rain if you do. On the other hand there are dances and special occasions for which one must wear lehua. In that case, with the proper ritual and prayer, it is permissible to pick lehua, a few from each tree, and never more than one from a branch.

'Ohi'as have become very dear to me, not only because they are everywhere, but most of all because I admire their fierce will to live. They are not majestic, or symmetrical. In fact, they are often scrawny trees, but they broadcast survival.

Each 'ohi'a tree has a few lehua blossoms most of the time, although not evenly scattered. It is not unusual to see two blossoms on the same twig, a third a little further on the same branch, while the rest of the tree is dark and still, without that spark that lehua gives.

A tree with abundant lehua blossoms is blessed by Pele, they say. Or, I have heard people say that you can tell how dry it will be in Summer from the number of blossoms in early Spring.

My theory is that 'ohi'a like to be loved. When I lived in a previous house there was an 'ohi'a tree in front of my living room window that I had admired from the beginning. I do not know why, exactly. I think because it looked strong and capable, and tough. Also I think because the lower 18 inches of that tree were a mass of scars, wounds that the wood had grown around,

at least coped with. The tree must have suffered greatly in its youth, those scars told me. Immediately above the scars was a thick ridge, which, the tree told me, meant that after the period of the scars, there had been a period of healing, of withdrawing inside, gathering strength. During that time the tree had not grown much, what growth had taken place was in girth. As if the tree made a statement: The scars are behind me, now, On with it!

Above that ring the tree grew normally and rapidly, from what I could see. The first year I was there the tree had so many red blossoms, it could pass for a Christmas tree. Every year thereafter the tree produced more lehua blossoms. At times I thought perhaps the tree was telling me it loved me...

Then I read somewhere that plants often produce more flowers when somehow they sense that their survival is at stake. That makes sense, I thought. Flowers are, after all, an important step in the wonderfully complicated way nature has invented to let genes pass their program on to following generations. If a single plant is 'threatened' in some way, the complex mechanism of its chemical metabolism sees to it that reproduction is given an extra burst of energy.

From that day on, I worried about the tree. I felt sorry for it. I feared something was evidently threatening that poor tree since evidently it had to fight for its life by making more and more flowers. I studied that tree and its environment to understand why that particular tree would feel so threatened? It looked wonderfully healthy, full of leaves—many 'ohi'a trees suffer from spotty baldness—and the leaves were brisk, strong, a good color. If I sent any energy to that tree at all, I sent worry, not love.

I think it was October when I read the article that set me thinking about my friend, the 'ohi'a tree that grew in front of my window. In December all the lehua blossoms had fallen off; no Christmas tree that year. Other trees too had lost some blossoms in the storms we had that year, but these other trees still had some lehua here and there.

In March it rained a lot, and that is a time when 'ohi'a trees wait. They do not grow much. I think they know to absorb as much moisture as they can store, for drier times. April was beautiful, May was warm and pleasant with more than enough rain to satisfy us all. June, July, August.

Finally I realized that the special tree had not had a single lehua since 'that day'. Something was seriously wrong!

Being a fairly rational person, I tried to figure it out. Maybe it had so many blossoms before that it ran out of flower-making energy. Or perhaps that particular tree goes in long cycles, some years with lots of flowers, then one year none at all?

I studied books, none telling me much about why or when 'ohi'a's flower (they all noted that they bloom more or less continuously...).

Then I re-read the original article. Yes, that is what it said. Humans as well, the article said, become more fertile when they are underfed (but not starved). So, according to the scientists, it must be a general rule.

I was not getting anywhere in my research until one day it finally dawned on me that I had to approach this from an entirely different angle. I went to the tree, stood as close as I could to the trunk, embraced the tree and asked, What is wrong, my friend?

The answer washed through me, I miss you, I miss your warm thoughts that flowed around me.

No, not in those words of course, but I use poetry to express a miracle. The tree communicated to me that it missed my loving attention. My 'worries' did not send very positive energies!

In fact, I had probably surrounded it with such a barrage of 'worries' that it needed all its own energy to just stay alive.

Still embracing the tree, I felt what I call 'love' flowing between me and the tree, wishing-well thoughts, wishing health, strength, long life to this tree and all the trees around.

Such love illuminates and lightens, leaving darkness behind.



**My Economy** is quite simple I assumed before looking at it. Money coming in, money going out. I am not spending more than I have coming in (which is mostly 'retirement income'—occasionally I earn a little bit here and there, but not regularly, I do not count on it). I have no debts that I do not pay off each month. Guess I am doing better than the country!

But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that 'money' does not describe the economy of my living as part of this earth very well at all. Perhaps, I thought, I could get a better idea when I looked at stuff going in and going out. How much do I use of the earth, and how much do I put back?

I live alone, so what comes in and what goes out is not hard to see. Once a week I go to town to shop, bringing back mostly food and other consumables. Most of it I use, eat, wear. Almost all the food I bring here stays here, in the different compost piles I maintain, and in the form of my human wastes (no sewers here).

Each week I marvel again at how heavy is what I bring in, compared to the garbage I take out to the dump, also about once a week. Much of what I throw out is packing, wrapping, and lots of plastic. I pay for the packaging, of course, as I pay for bringing some of the manufactured goods to Hawai'i from wherever they are made.

We have become used to living in a society designed to waste. It is very hard for most of us to even imagine how we could live differently.

I reduced the amount of garbage somewhat by buying food that is grown locally and sold unwrapped, or in bulk. This makes me feel better but it reduces the amount of non-degradable material I throw away each week hardly at all. Of course I re-cycle what I can, but that is limited on this island.

Consumables is not all I bring in, however. Every week day I go to the post office to get my mail. Astonishing amounts of junk mail fill my box. It must take many trees to make the paper to print attention getting messages: buy this, subscribe to that, donate to this charity. Paper recycling does not work well when there are no paper mills nearby, so my weekly garbage bag is weighted down with paper

wrappings, card board, a few used newspapers. Magazines and catalogs, of course, I pass on to friends and family.

But even when I am careful, I bring in more than I take out. The difference is a measure of the energy I need to keep me breathing. What I need to keep breathing is air, food, warmth in the

form of clothes and shelter and occasionally some heat (it gets chilly here!). I admit that I also believe I need books, or other materials to stimulate my mind — I cannot resist books.

It takes energy to feed my body, but it also requires energy to maintain me and my shelter. I wash clothes in a small, apartment-sized washing machine and dry in a small dryer, a set that comes with the house. When possible I hang wash on the line (more work for me, less electricity used). You may think that the sun shines every day, all the time, in Hawai'i, but that is not true here. I discovered that towels dry faster than t-shirts, and that dark t-shirts dry appreciably faster than those shiny white ones. So, I went to look for brown, blue, even black t-shirts, and (of course) the day I went shopping they were on sale!

To sum up this strange equation, what I need to stay alive comes to me in the form of 1) food , 2) pounds of non-degradable packaging , 3) electricity to maintain the shelter I live in and power the machines I 'need' for maintenance and 4) trees for the paper I use. Altogether quite a lot of energy for one person. For the energy I receive, what do I give back?

That is 'my economy'.

I do not produce much that is useful to other people, I perform a few essential services: sometimes I counsel people, now mostly on the net, I write of course, I design and print business cards — but all in all it does not seem much. Being 'retired' means that in the eyes of society I did my work before, now I am allowed to receive, doing nothing. Of course I cannot do nothing, so I use the doing-nothing time society (not nature!) allows me to finally 'be' who I am.

Unquestionably, I use more than I return. I may think of my life style as 'simple'—and it is, compared to many others—but I use much more measurable energy, of course, than the majority of humans on this earth. That bothers me.



What I feel good about is the care and attention I give to this little plot of land, and the many forms of life growing in it and on it. I receive much nurture and support, and I give back care. There is a balance, a harmony that feels right, and that makes it something other than an economy. I have a sense of energy flowing between me and the environment in both directions. No loss, no waste. A connection.

That energy feels like love. As others have known all along, love is powerful energy that does not operate by the same principles as the energy of fuel, for instance.

The more love you give, the more there is...

### #3

“Meditation is not a matter of trying to achieve ecstasy, spiritual bliss or tranquility, nor is it attempting to become a better person. It is simply the creation of a space in which we are able to expose and undo our neurotic games, our self-deceptions, our hidden fears and hopes.”

Chögyam Trungpa, *The Myth of Freedom*



For many years, toward the end of the year, I have sat down to write this story. Each year I go through at least one day of reliving what happened long ago, agonizing over how to write about it this time. The story is not important—what I have learned from it is. Some of you have read earlier versions of this story; I hope you do not mind seeing it again, in this year’s dress.

Winter 1944, a time now known in Holland as *The Hunger Winter*. Holland had been occupied by the Germans for more than four years then, and would remain occupied until the next summer. In December of 1944 the war did not go well for the Germans — it did not go well for the Allies either. Earlier that year, the Allies had landed an airborne division in the eastern part of Holland in an attempt to make a swift end to the war. It left the Allies in control of small pieces of land that undoubtedly made life more difficult for the Germans, but it did not end the war. For us, who were caught behind the lines, so to speak, the war got much worse. The Germans were still in control of the western part of Holland where the big cities are, and held a fragile life-line to Germany.

I lived with good people who took great risks housing—and hiding—me and a few other young men. All men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five had been called to work in Germany to ‘assist in the war effort’, as they said. We called it slave labor and we knew that foreigners manning essential war factories, would simply free up more Germans to fight their war. I did not want to be caught; I had to hide.

German soldiers were getting nastier, they felt threatened. They were threatened, by the Allies as well as by the Resistance in many countries of Western Europe. A month earlier soldiers had surrounded Rotterdam and in three days searched every house. Other times they had searched for contraband, or ‘underground newsletters’; during the winter of 1944 they looked for people.

That winter the Germans were also systematically stealing what was left in the western part of Holland, no longer chocolate, sugar, radios, blankets and other consumer goods — now they took what could be used for their war effort: the copper wire of the overhead power line of the railroads, later the rails. They took fuel: coal, gas, oil, so that we were without light, without heat, and often without water. Food, rationed for four years, now was very difficult to find, soldiers took first what was still to be found on farms.

In our house we survived on sugar beets and tulip bulbs; some did not survive. I was twenty-two and had been living under German Occupation for four years. I had joined the Resistance very early: my parents were in another part of the world, there were no people who would worry about me or who

could be held hostage for me. In the earliest days of the war, resisters were those who had resisted all their lives, the 'underworld'. It was they who taught me to survive being prey. I learned to hide, but mostly I learned being always on the alert, thinking of escape routes even in sleep. Much later, when we had weapons, I learned to shoot handguns, rifles and assault weapons.

The Hunger Winter was bad. Living was dangerous. I did jobs for the Resistance: I remember those as very dangerous. We were hungry most of the time. We had no lights, no Christmas trees, no gifts. It was a bleak, cold and dark winter.

From the beginning of the Occupation there had been a curfew from sunset to sunrise: nobody was allowed out during the hours of darkness. That year the Germans gave us a Christmas present: curfew would be lifted for a few hours on Christmas Eve, so that churches could have services in the dark of a late December afternoon.

Very near our house was a small Catholic church. Some of us decided to go to Mass; we could run home in less than a minute if we had to. It would be an adventure, relief perhaps from the endless struggle to stay alive and alert.

Religion had not played much part in my life, although I thought much about things we now would call 'spiritual'. Any church service would be a novelty, Catholic Mass a mystery. I had seen the inside of cathedrals as a tourist, but I had no idea what went on during a service—and this was 1944, when Mass was said in Latin.

The little church was packed. We carefully faced forward, looking at the three or four priests who were doing mysterious things on what I thought of as 'the stage'. We looked ahead because nobody wanted to be recognized or recognize anybody. It was obvious that there were many people in that church who would have to be careful not to be seen in daylight. We pretended we did not see who sat next to us; when a few late-comers drifted in, we squeezed together on the wooden benches, careful not to look at our neighbors.

I cannot remember the beginning of the Mass, but gradually there seemed to be a rhythm to the comings and goings around the altar. Some of the people in the church knew what to do: kneel, say a prayer, stand up, say a prayer, kneel again. Most of us remained seated. What the priests were saying was lost to me, I did not understand Latin. Yet, everyone there felt a sense of uplift, of hope. We were so sick of war, we yearned for peace, for better times, for an end to what was then an intolerable yoke of oppression. I could almost see our yearnings spiral around the candles. Yes, there were a few candles. It had been years since anybody could buy a candle. In our homes we had strange contraptions that burned what oil we could find, using wicks made of old clothes. In the little church were real candles, not many but enough.

That afternoon I gave myself to the healing balm of being with strangers and yet feeling safe, sharing, even without words, our suffering. I am sure some of us dared hope again. Maybe the Germans were getting more lenient, maybe they knew they had lost the war anyway, and they were trying to show us how decent they really were. Maybe the war would end soon. I let myself be in an ancient rite that seemed fraught with holiness and Divine grace, even though I could not understand the words.

The Mass seemed to be moving toward some sort of apotheosis. It was very still in the church, we sat spellbound, everyone's attention riveted on the senior priest who solemnly approached the altar, lifting his face to the cross, his back to us, raising his arms... At that



moment, a young priest stepped out of the darkness, facing us. He stood in front of the older priest, almost back to back. The young priest, in Dutch, spoke over the singsong of the Mass, very clearly and precisely:

We have received word that the Germans are about to raid this church. All who do not want to be found here, leave immediately and quickly.'

It took a second for his message to sink in. Then, without a word, at least half the people in the church got up and tip-toed out, leaving open prayer books in empty spaces on the benches.

Inside the church it had been shadowy; outside it was pitch dark (there had been no street lights for years). In seconds, all those who had left the church, were absorbed in the early night. I ran home on soft feet. I could hear those who remained in the church begin to sing an old Christmas song: Silent Night... (they sang in Dutch, a song originally German).

Minutes later, four or five cars drove up, a dozen or more German soldiers fully armed, stormed into the church.

A few of us in my house had stationed ourselves at a window from where we could see a corner of the church. The singing seemed to have faded. We could not hear what went on inside. Then soldiers appeared outside the church dragging two priests out on the steps. Gunshots. More soldiers came out, dragging other men out. More gunshots.

Again we heard singing, louder, full. I heard women's voices, men's voices. I imagined children singing, high and loud. The soldiers got back in their cars and roared away.

For timeless moments the singing continued, then it died.

In dead, dark silence people slowly left the church, stumbling over the corpses that had been left on the steps. In our house nobody said a word, we were numb. I do not remember ever talking about what happened with anyone in the house, not even after the war. The next morning the Germans moved the bodies to be displayed, laid out in a row, in the cold winter's light, left there for a week.

Other incidents that last winter of the war pushed away my memory of Christmas Eve. Finding food became an obsession. I 'forgot' about this Christmas Eve for more than a quarter century, although for years I felt extremely uncomfortable around Christmas time, without knowing why.

Eventually I learned what the Mass means, what its ritual acts out, but I never could enter a Catholic church, although I could not have said why. Hearing Christmas songs on the radio, or later on television, made me physically nauseous. Twenty-five years later, in the early 70s, I took a workshop designed to get us in touch with a side of us our culture had suppressed: our soul, our heart, our intuition. I lived in Honolulu then.

It was warm and balmy that winter, flower scent in the air; a soft, warm rain—typical for December—fell all evening.

The day before Christmas Eve, we did an exercise in class. 'Very simple,' the teacher said: 'think back to an important event in your life and re-live it, re-experience it.'

After all those years, for some reason, I remembered that long-ago Christmas Eve. Not only remembered, but I relived and re-experienced it.

When that memory exploded back into my consciousness, I lost control. I felt as if my body was tearing apart, I could not deal with all the images, the feelings that crowded into my awareness. I had never felt so disoriented. I knew what the word 'devastated' means. I hurt! The pain of that great burst of many, different, contradictory feelings was too much to contain, to

comprehend. I felt as if someone had given me a punch in the solar plexus, I was hunched over, holding my stomach. I could hardly breathe. The other workshop students were supportive, but could not understand what was going on, and I could not tell them. I left.

At the time I shared an apartment with a friend who had an unusual knack for seeing into the heart of things. I told him what had happened in class as well as I could in bits and pieces between explosions of rage. I tried to control my emotions, to be coherent, but not too successfully.

My friend made me feel some better; 'he was there for me', as we say today. We had a cup of soup, or coffee, I do not remember. It was late night, or very early morning. I was still shaking uncontrollably and felt overwhelmed.

Over his cup of steaming coffee or soup he looked at me with a strange expression, his head cocked to the side and said, "most of what I picked up was tremendous anger and rage." I nodded, yes. I still could not speak, overcome with waves of nausea. Violent feelings were still roiling around inside me, without having sorted themselves into coherence.

Quietly and thoughtfully, he said, "what makes you so angry?" I stammered something about 'the Germans...'.

He interrupted me, held up his hand, stop! He said very, very softly—I had to strain to hear him—"what about the Christians?" I did not know what he was talking about.

Our friendship was based on helping each other 'see'. We were honest with each other; even in my agony, I took him seriously. I knew that what he said was important. Suddenly, I understood. What he said broke through my emotional storm to some place deep inside, I could see around, beyond my anger and heard 'the Christians' sing.

I still vividly recall that 'shift' in point of view.

Now I heard the swelling sound of song coming from the little church. Voices pure —or maybe not so pure but achingly human. The singing a light in the cold dark night; that sound the only reference point in my mind. Hearing the singing I hardly heard the gunshots any more.

What about the Christians' became a sort of mnemonic. For years the phrase would remind me to look at anything, particularly highly charged emotional happenings, from at least two points of view, from more than one angle. That takes practice, of course. We are conditioned to choose one point of view and stick to it. I found it an important skill to learn to see beyond the obvious.

Of course I knew also that I had to sort out and somehow deal with those clashing emotions that had all emerged at once.

My anger, and the other side of that coin: fear, had come back first, in a rush. This memory brought back a hundred others of the war that stole five years of my life (important years: between ages 18 and 23). I felt rage again at having to relive being helpless in the face of forces that trampled all subtleties, reliving the necessity of hiding. Rage also at the ruthless oppression we endured.

It took great effort to get beyond that. I had to be reminded 'What about the Christians'.

But after learning to hear 'the Christians' again, I also had to get past 'feeling sorry' for the people who were killed.

That perhaps was even more difficult.

Today everyone has seen murder and mayhem on television as shocking as my Christmas Eve

memory: soldiers storming into a church, killing priests, leaving bodies as an example—all that has become every day fare. At the end of this century everyone knows that is what people do.

If it took me 25 years to remember, it took me another almost twenty to understand and accept that humans do things I do not understand.

It took me a long time to stop expecting people to behave as I thought they ought to. Wars are not just in the pages of history, they are with us all the time, everywhere. Wars are fought not only between countries, but within countries, within families even. Many of us have festering wounds from expecting people to be other than they are.

The wounds are real; what is not real is to deny them.

Now, afterwards, I am grateful that I faced the pain and confusion by sorting out at least a few of the mix of contrary emotions, although it was and is hard work. I can accept that some shreds of that memory will always be with me. The scar is there. When I think of it, the memory is still full of strong emotions. Now it is not rage that I feel but a complex many-faceted loving acceptance of all that it is to be human.

Of course I know that it is just as often the Christians who kill and the Germans who sing. Today there are Bosnians who kill and other, courageous Bosnians who love. Or Irish, Indians, Africans, Arabs and Israelis, and of course we ourselves, we all have the ability to love as well as hate. I remind myself that Christ told us to love each other as we love ourselves—not as we wish ourselves or others to be, but as we are. The Buddha said that we may not be able to be free of the pain and suffering that comes from being alive, but we can rise above it by compassion, which I understand to mean unconditional love, love without judgment, without expectations, without conditions. Some people kill, others sing, and some—many?—do both. What else can we do but to love what is?

There have been times when I thought I wanted to attend a midnight mass on Christmas Eve again. I thought I wanted to feel again the hope we had felt in the darkest of that winter night.

We so yearned to be safe again, safe in our own homes, our own streets. We wanted to be reassured that life was not just unrelenting hunger, endless cold, the sick fear we all knew twenty-four hours a day. We desperately wanted to know that things would be alright again, or at least better. When, toward the end of the Mass, the priest raised his arms, I held my breath.

I expected some great thing to happen, a miracle, a lightning flash, a thunder clap. God would hurl down a new Commandment that would magically put right the awful mess we had made on earth.

But God did not thunder. A man gave us warning.

I owe my life to that young priest; he himself must have been killed. I do not know his name, but I honor him, as I honor the people inside the little church who sang.

Since we made a mess, is it not we also who have to clean it up?



“That thou mayest have pleasure in everything,  
seek pleasure in nothing. That thou mayest know everything,  
seek to know nothing. That thou mayest possess all things,  
seek to possess nothing. That thou mayest be everything,  
seek to be nothing.”

St. John of the Cross

## #4

“Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery.  
And Today? Today is a gift, that's why we call it 'The Present'.”

Babatunde Olatunji



Jan. 26, '97. This newsletter celebrates a milestone. In a matter of days I shall be 75, a venerable age in any culture.

During these three quarters of a century the man-made world has gone through many changes. On a global scale its geography changed little, and what changed was changed by man. Politically the world humans have created for themselves is unrecognizable from what it was when I grew up — it was a different world. The population of the earth has increased perhaps four times, and the increase has been strongly tilted to poor nations and peoples who have increased as much as six or seven times in the same time.

In my lifetime I have lived like a king, and I have lived like a pauper. I have learned from the experience and theories of thousands of people, and have used at most a third of that. It has taken me as much time and tears to unlearn things as it took to learn them. I have experienced many of the emotions we humans are capable of feeling. I have lived with others and alone. I have had enormous expectations and great disappointments. There are few memories of heroism in my life, and many more of cowardice. There are remembered successes and failures. I have held opinions I no longer hold. I have believed things I no longer believe, but my face still faces forward, although my eyes see closer by. I no longer plan in terms of decades — to tell the truth, I have learned that life works better when I do not plan much at all.

What is left after I peel off layers of self-analysis, is an ever greater need to maintain my integrity. My integrity is that sense of being plugged in to what is 'right'. I sometimes visualize myself as a spindle, spinning on a constantly shifting, moving plate, maintaining its orientation (as a gyroscope). Today, more than ever, I have an almost physical feeling of being 'in line' — and wobbling wildly when I am not aligned..

All around me is what I call Disneyland, the world of today. Much of it 'feels' wrong. We, humans, do such odd things to our environment, and to each other. Perhaps that is because we sleep? Asleep or not, we humans act like children with power tools. We, the children, obviously do not know what we are doing, and have not matured enough to care about consequences.

Disneyland is of course almost impossible to escape, it is our physical world. I need money to survive in this world, I need to buy things. I need many of the services a civilized world provides, although I can see a time when some of us will be excluded from even basic services that we can no longer pay for them.

Some—many of them my friends—make groups, bound by common practices, ceremonies, rituals and beliefs. That does not work for me. I must stand aloof from this world that does not feel right to me. Forming little worlds of like-minded people seems a way to close my eyes to

what Disneyland is rushing to, I want to see, be awake.

I feel 'right' when I am in the world of what we in our language call 'nature', a world of soil and water and air and fire and a staggering (although declining) number of life forms that coexist nurturing and eating each other. A world of weather, thunder and lightning, sunshine and rain; a world of day and night, winter and summer; a world, where we are never alien because we are this world.

In what I call the real world I understand plants and trees and cats and dogs, and sometimes even people. In the real world I need not pretend, because as I know the plants, they know me. When I feel wonderful I go outside to be with the plants. When I feel rotten I go outside to be with the plants. It is the same.

It is in that world, the real world, that drives home how much we, humans, have lost in the past few thousand years. Most of all, of course, that sense of belonging to the whole, which—to me, at least—is what has made me whole.

My community is that strange group of people who know that oneness. I know a few of them, I know of a few more. We live in deserts and on mountains, even in cities perhaps; at 17,000 feet and at sea level. We have different names for us, we do not speak each other's language, but—and that is a wondrous thing—we communicate with each other.

I have no thought that we, this remnant of long-ago times, are the chosen people. In the big boil that is humankind we are a cell, and who can tell whether ours is healthy or a tumor cell? I shall do my darndest to stay in my world, resisting multiple pressures to suck me into Disneyland. I have few expectations, I try to live one day at a time, enjoying, praising each day, as I cherish and love the earth that grew me and supports me.

Thank you, Life, for an adventurous, exciting, painful and joyous life.



Winter in Volcano is something very special. Yes, it rains a lot. At least, when it rains, it rains a lot — but there are times and days in between when it does not rain and then it is incredibly, magically beautiful here. Like today, bright sunlight is washing everything from above and below and sideways. You can feel the life-giving energy of this sunlight. There is some wind that adds to the perception of cleansing, the wind blows dust and doubts away.

This afternoon it may well be clouding over, then suddenly turn colder, and by evening there is rain. Maybe a storm, we have those too, with fierce, cold winds and slashing rain. But now the sun is shining.

Yesterday was blustery and wet and good for nothing much, so I defrosted my little refrigerator. When I first moved here, I did know it needed to be defrosted. Monthly. Then I put it on my calendar: the 17th of every month, 'defrost frig'. But sometimes the 17th was not convenient, and I would forget to defrost until the door would not stay shut any more. Then I knew I had to defrost.

I have it down to a system now. It is boring work, messy work in some stages,

it takes some planning and a lot of cleaning up after. But I have learned how to do it most efficiently, so now I meditate in between the necessary actions.

This time the meditation took off like a kite, Zap, I was chewing on another memory. Not a very clean memory because this one is the combination of a whole set of memories that together form a meta-memory. Let me summarize. The end of 'the war' was not a date for us, or even an event. Almost unnoticed we slid from 'war' to 'peace' — and one was not much different from the other.

It took a month and more for Germans to go back to Germany, Canadians and later Americans to come to Holland, eventually our own government came back from exile, then our Queen came back. We still did not have much to eat, but it was a lot safer at home and on the street. Roads were open again, there was no gasoline yet but the Americans could drive around and we did not mind asking rides from friendly soldiers — we would never have dared ask a German soldier for a ride! Gradually there was even food again.

Early in that agonizing transition period I was given a job to do for the Resistance (for a while we had been what little government there was). I was asked to be a prison guard, at a temporary prison made in a school. Prisoners were those who had profited from and collaborated with the Germans during the war. There were a few women who had been known 'girl friends' of the Germans, but most of the prisoners when I stood guard were men who had profited from dealing with the Germans.

I cannot remember whether I was allowed to talk with the prisoners, but as I walked around with a machine gun casually slung from one shoulder, finger on the trigger, one man, somewhat older than I, begged to talk to me. He threw himself on his knees, tried to kiss my shoes, weeping, asking forgiveness, pleading innocence, or at least naiveté: "I did not know..."

I felt contempt, disgust for this obviously well-fed man (we were skeletons at the time), moaning, sobbing, wringing his hands. This is the enemy, I thought? I felt betrayed. For five years I had risked my life for... to give this despicable man a fair trial? For five years I had told myself that 'they' could be nothing but the most awesomely evil beings. Now I discovered that the enemy was stupid, cowardly — strutting and growling only when they were protected by other armed men. This man happened to be a specimen of what Hitler claimed was the superior race, large, blonde and blue-eyed — but what a slimy character this true aryan was!

The refrigerator was done. I had mopped up the inside as well as I could, the wet floor was mopped, I had cleaned up the rags. It was obviously time to make some tea. I got up to plug in the electric kettle, realizing that getting up from

sitting on the floor is not as easy as it used to be. In fact, I was glad there was no audience to have laughed at my ungainly and jittery transition from down on the floor to at the sink.

Around the year change I had a nasty cold that disabled me for a few days. I felt miserable, had no energy, stayed home and stayed indoors (well, not entirely, of course, but mostly). It was a time when I watched TV during hours that I had never watched TV before. Television is supposed to be a reflection of our culture. Or, at least they always tell us that they give us exactly what we ask for. Somewhere I read that television is aimed for 14 year-olds (or is it 12 year-olds?). I had never seen daytime ‘talk

shows’. Amazing! It is here that everyone gets her or his 15 minutes of fame. We have apparently have an unlimited hunger for the fortunes and misfortunes of our neighbors. How we applaud when ordinary people are ‘made over’ to look more glamorous (according to the fashions of today). We love heroes, and we shudder with sympathy for victims. We love sleazy details about what people do in bed.

After 6pm the format changes somewhat, shows are directed at 15 year-olds, perhaps. Evenings are mostly fun and violence. Endless massacres in the name of the law, or in the name of some other organization, or in the name of an idea or a wish. The ‘fun’ is usually the ability to speak fast and make fun of. And on ‘public’ television I discovered what I learned are called ‘nature shows’ and ‘animal shows’. That is where our alienation is ground in, fixed, set in concrete. The world, as it is shown to us from cameras that are obviously *right there*, is a backdrop, scenery with some fascinating creatures put there for our enjoyment... from a safe distance, of course. Even when we are shown predators devouring prey, when we see the blood dripping from big white teeth, we know we are safe. We do not smell. Our heart rate does not go up, no adrenaline flushes through our system.



This is the last stretch before we reach the year 2000. My computer will not even hiccup when we pass that momentous threshold, because it is a Macintosh. The little date program of the majority of computers in use today only works until December 31, 1999. That is apparently how far ahead the wizards who created DOS, now wrapped up in Windows, could imagine to go.

To guide us through these last four years we have a President who has been accused of the ‘in’ crime of sexual harassment, a term to describe what all men did before women spoke up — and a Speaker of the House who admitted to being less than ethical or moral (and those two words have become almost synonymous in the Media) in his dealings with money, so he got a slap on the wrist and must pay a fine. I imagine that many citizens today feel as I do: ho hum, so what else is new? Both charges may be fabrications for political gain, and if not fabrications they are for behavior that seems to be the norm for politicians.

Both leaders think alike, they only know one way to solve problems: fight, declare war. We wage war on the deficit, on ‘crime’, on drugs, on aliens, on people who believe differently than we believe. The War to End War was before I was born, but I remember well a War to make the World Safe for Democracy — a democracy, it turned out, wed to capitalism, a system designed to make a few men rich by making millions of us poor. Then we had a War on Poverty, which

resulted in a very small percentage of the population now holding most of the wealth of the nation. We continue to have a War on Drugs, which so far has cost us \$150 billion (with a b), which gets a lot of coverage and puts many thousands of people in jail, while ‘the problem’ persists. Now we are to have a War on Crime, by putting yet more people in jails — which means paying to build more jails and coming up with the estimated \$40,000 a year to keep a man locked away. (If you noticed that I used only he and him, that has been on purpose).

Allow me tell you a very short story. For my American degree I had to write a thesis, a report of a piece of research that I would have to design, do, and evaluate by myself. There had to be lots of statistics, of course, so there also were lots of things I had to measure (to get some figures to play with). I cannot even remember at this far remove what my ‘hypothesis’ was, but I do remember that I worked very hard to clearly state that ‘I believe that if one does such and such, a predictable result can be measured to show so and so’ — which is what an hypothesis is.

I designed an experiment to prove my hypothesis. I agonized over how to measure what behaviors, but that too of course was related to my hypothesis, so when at last I did the experiment (with groups of

volunteer fellow-students) I recorded an enormous amount of information and observations. That allowed me to do a great number of very sophisticated statistical manipulations, hopefully showing that my hypothesis had been right.

Forty-some years ago we had no computers, only clumsy machines that sorted cards with punched holes. I worked hard on the machine, and after that with a calculator, but however much I tried, in the end I had to admit that my experiment had not worked. What I had predicted would happen, did not. When I reported this to the professors who were guiding me, they, with one voice said, well then you have to do another experiment. I asked how I could make another experiment to prove something that I now knew was not true?

In the end they were willing to at least see a draft of my thesis the way I felt it should be written (snickering behind my back). I wrote as clearly as I could about the hypothesis, why I had designed the experiment as I did, gave the statistics, and ended with a chapter in which I said that my hypothesis had proven to be wrong. What I predicted would happen did not. However, I added, that only showed that I must change my original idea about how people would behave. I had learned something.

Perhaps to their own surprise they accepted my thesis. I see many similarities between my story and today’s addiction to fighting as a way to solve societal problems. We have reams of statistics to demonstrate that our predictions were wrong. War on anything has never ‘solved’ anything. Our politicians can make a law making alcohol illegal, putting people in jail for making or consuming alcohol, but years of Prohibition made clear that it did not reduce alcohol consumption. No war has ended poverty, no war has made any changes in those use of drugs declared illegal. However the country has spent billions of dollars. Why cannot politicians admit that, Hey, Sorry folks, We meant well, but now we see that we were wrong. Or even admit that perhaps we should look at the cost of a war and evaluate whether it is worth it. Or admit that our war was fought with the wrong weapons... But politics is not scientific. The War on Drugs does not have an hypothesis, it exists because some politicians ‘know’ that using drugs is bad, and statistics have never convinced a righteous politician. The war on drugs is not about something real, it is about the power to forcefully lay one’s will on another. That is generally



what fighting wars is about. We did not really want to eradicate poverty, we just wanted poverty to be visible. Maybe one reason for the war on poverty was the desire to create jobs in this country, a wonderful idea. But now, a few decades later, we see that 'poverty' is alive and well, in fact is thriving. Instead of reducing poverty, we as a society enormously increased the number of poor and the degree of their poverty. I call that a lost war but it seems nobody can admit that.



Today is getting to be a day of remembrance. It is not even 2pm, but when the sun faded and the dark clouds came, the light changed. This morning, even very early when it was misty, the light seemed strong; now the light is weak, faded. Fading light brought fading being-here-now.

Sounds. The sound of a thousand planes flying over, heavy with bombs, flying to Germany to destroy another city and kill a thousand people. Waves of sound: swelling, fading, then a pause. The next plane first a faint whisper of drone, then swelling, growling overhead, fading. Going on and on and on until I feared my skull would burst.

After the fading of one drone an expectation of another, until suddenly I would realize that it had stopped. For now, at least. Until it begins again as they come back on their way home to England.

At times I tried to predict 'the last' plane, so high one could barely hear it, then leaving an enormous silence, that I very well knew only I could end, but I did not dare. Occasionally there was no break, as the last plane ponderously flew East with its bombs crossed the first of the returning plane, lighter now on its way back to England. My focus on hearing the least sound from up in the sky left me breathless.

Now I wonder why I listened so intensely for the least sound during those endless bombing raids. I knew that Allied planes were 'shortening the war', we felt safe enough because we knew we were not the target. 'Our' news (we were not allowed to listen to the BBC, of course) told us the following day in lurid detail of the perfidious destruction of yet another city in the Fatherland, killing thousands of innocent citizens.

There was also another sound that came back into memory, the whines of the jet engines that powered the latest 'flying bombs'. We did not know them as jets, so, to me, that unique jet-flying-over noise is still associated with bombs. When a flying bomb (today we would call it a missile) was launched there was first a slight thump, then the rising whine of the jet — and we would hold our breath to listen attentively where this one was going, whether it would fall back,

as half of them did, and so hit us, or whether it would stay up there flying (as fast as a bullet 'our' (the German) media told us) aimed to fall on London... I can still feel that intense listening.

We imagined that the placement of the flying bomb launchers was quite deliberate, on the land side of the city, so that bombs that did not make it fell on Rotterdam. That was at the very end of the war, I think, when we had little to eat, no light, I

was cold much of the time. My memory of that time, the time of the flying bombs, is so vague that the only impressions that surface are the sounds of war. The noise of the jets was terrifying, I knew I was in real danger. The raids on German cities was not a danger to us, and yet...

I think even then I knew that war is never a solution.

The real reason, I think, that I remember and cannot seem to lose war memories is that they bring back that feeling of being caught helplessly in a situation where it was made almost impossible to 'think', to clarify my own integrity. We suffered, we were being ruled very harshly, we were hungry, we were in constant fear of our lives — it was only too easy to see all that as bad things done to us by an enemy, and thereby losing the ability to think with a wider horizon.

The situation was designed to force us to see a certain movie. All rules were made by the Germans, enforced with guns (in a country where even the police never carried arms). The media were propaganda.

A war on poverty makes it impossible for us to think rationally about what poverty is, how it comes about in the richest nation on earth, who makes it, how could it be

abolished... And of course another effect of having a government declare war on something is that then we expect the government to take care of it. We do not have to think about poverty then, even if we wanted to. As we can no longer think about 'drugs' in any kind of rational way.

Our world is a world of experts. It has been and continues to be drummed into us that we cannot possibly know 'the truth', only very specialized scientists know that. We cannot possibly know what is best for the country, so the government does that for us. We cannot possibly know what is best for ourselves, so government and the scientists decide that for us as well.

We are constantly reminded to stay asleep — to believe what we read and hear on TV and Reader's Digest. All that is asked of us is that we pay our taxes and that we be productive citizens, making lots of stuff. For the rest the Media entertain us, we do not have to think, in fact it would be better if we did not,

they constantly remind us!

It is so hard for me to accept that scenario. I know, deep in my heart, that experts do not know ‘the truth’ (because they are asking the wrong questions). I do not think the government knows what is best for us. I am not afraid to make mistakes, and am willing to accept the consequences.

The sounds I heard, the sounds of war, again made clear that humans have a rare talent to create movies. War movies are the simplest to make, because they have a simple plot: ‘they’ are bad and ‘we’ are good. Our TV is full of war movies, even if the wars are fought in our own streets, and there are no soldiers but lots of police. Love stories are not simple, but we make them simple: boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy finds girl, they kiss., happy ending.

I still resist being caught in those movies. It is a struggle!



I had a dream — forgive me, Dr. King, but really, I was dreaming, and... I was sitting in front of the computer as I am now, and the television was on, sort of as background, I was not aware what was on and did not care. Suddenly the broadcast cut and I heard, “We interrupt this program for a special announcement...”

I turned around and I saw the screen sort of flickering, then focusing on a familiar face, the President of the United States.

I stood up and moved to see the television from the sofa. “Ladies and Gentlemen, the President...”

“My Fellow Americans (or was that a previous president? There have been so many...) I hope I am not interrupting something, I mean I hope you don’t mind my coming into your living room...”

What is going on, this is serious! He has lost his script! “I am not reading from a prepared speech, these are my own words...What I have to say to you is not easy to say.”

Long Pause. “So perhaps I have to say it as simply as I know how...”

I was wrong. I made some bad decisions, and some of the things I wanted to do did not work, and others—and that is even worse—I knew from the beginning were kind of crooked, but I really meant well. Except... now, for some reason... I see that...”

The camera focuses more closely: “Yes, well, from now on all the resources of this nation, will go to restoration of the earth. All the resources.” Wow! Would not that be something? I believe in Miracles. I also believe that we are in such serious danger that nothing short of a miracle could help us out.

does it not behoove us then to create such a miracle?



"Before our white brothers came to civilize us we had no jails. Therefore we had no criminals. You can't have criminals without a jail. We had no locks or keys, and so we had no thieves. If a man was so poor that he had no horse, tipi or blanket, someone gave him these things. We were too uncivilized to set much value on personal belongings. We wanted to have things only in order to give them away. We had no money, and therefore a man's worth couldn't be measured by it. We had no written law, no attorneys or politicians, therefore we couldn't cheat."

Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions, Pocket Books, © 1972

**Youth is a work of nature. Old age, a work of art.**

anonymous

## #5

Apologies for letting so much time pass before sending this newsletter. No excuses, of course, except an unusually busy schedule with visitors, singly and in pairs, following one another all through the month of February (and into this month). Wonderful to see old friends, meet new ones, learn much and talk much! Thank you who came to see me — I hope next year your visits will be spread out over a longer period of time!

Although I did not promise that I would produce a newsletter once a month, I had hoped that is what I would do. Perhaps I shall make it up later this year when I can produce two newsletters in one month!



“You must have been warned against letting the golden hours slip by. “Yes, but some of them are golden only because we let them slip.”

James M. Barrie



As I assembled the last newsletter I listened to a tape. I heard “... the body is a wonderful machine”. I stopped. I wanted to tell that narrator, We are not machines. Sure, I think machines are helpful and of course extremely clever — after all, we make them. Humans and other beings, however, are organisms with the unique capacity to be aware of ourselves, and heal ourselves. We think ourselves sick; we can also think ourselves well.

To heal Westerners must unlearn how we think of ourselves and the world we live in. Our science sees all reality as bits and pieces, atoms, molecules of this and that, glued together to make organs, muscles, an eye, a hand, a foot, interacting through measurable energetic processes. We are enamored and enslaved by what we think of as modern science, a way of thinking that takes apart what is — paying little attention to the ‘whole’.

As every medical student learns, one can dissect a body, name all the muscles, bones and nerves, but that does not make a human, or even a frog. Parts make a cadaver; a human is an organism, a ‘whole’.

I used to do a simple experiment with my students. Put both hands on the table in front of you. Now make your left hand colder and your right hand warmer. Very simple, that’s it. Try it. The first few times I did this in class, I went around and felt the warmth of hands with my hand. Later I substituted two digital thermometers. Regardless of how we measured, almost half of the students showed measurable difference in temperature between the right and left hand. The other half did not.

When I asked, What did you do ? the people who did not show temperature differences gave long explanations of how they tried to restrict blood flow to the left hand, or increase the flow to the right hand...; the people whose hands showed measurable temperature differentials

shrugged their shoulders and said, I have no idea what I did, I just...

I interpreted that to mean that giving your body detailed instructions does not work. But if I tell myself make the left hand colder and the right warmer, something inside knows what to do. I think healing works like that too.

If one were to 'think' how to control and/or change the enormously complex processes that regulate blood sugar, absorption of nutrients, the workings of enzymes and hormones, we would almost certainly get hopelessly lost in the complexities of each process and the interactions with other processes the body regulates as a matter of course. We can ask our body to do the best it can, without needing to control how the body goes about it. Daily I ask my body to function smoothly and optimally.

What more can I ask?

"It is useless to attempt to reason a man out of a thing he was never reasoned into." Jonathan Swift



All my friends—all visitors—get a tour of my garden. That is where I live. The plants have taught me so much! The lesson I learned this past month was that there are no words to express what growing things mean to me, but words are not always needed. It was exciting to see that some other people also feel the energy of plants and trees.

The 'magic' of this garden is not in the size of tomatoes (I do not grow tomatoes), or in the weight of pumpkins (I do not grow pumpkins), but in the aura of pulsing, radiating Life that sends out rays of warmth, energy, love to who is able to sense that. I have always liked plants, I have always had a 'green thumb', but only the last few years have I allowed myself to talk with plants, thanks to an eye-opening book by Eliot Cowan<sup>1</sup> about the 'spirit' of plants. What a revelation to find others who talk with plants — something I have done all my life, but had suppressed as something that was just my imagination, or 'weird stuff' as I used to call it. Fortunately the ability to communicate with the spirit of plants had not atrophied in me (probably because I used that ability on the sly without admitting to my self that is what I was doing!).

Here it seems to be particularly easy to communicate with plant spirits, perhaps because this location, so close to an active volcano, is a 'power point'. But, no, it is not so much the nature of Nature here in Volcano, but my own way of seeing. I see plants the same way in other locations. Perhaps it is something like what some people call 'aura'?

The road in front of my house is unpaved lava. It is bumpy and rough, with cracks and holes (my car does not like it!). The little driveway that goes to my car port is asphalted. I observe the difference: the road and the driveway are just about the same color, but the driveway looks 'dead', the road looks 'alive'. I know, of course, that lava is not any more alive than asphalt, it just feels that way. Across the road is a dense forest in an infinite number of shades of green and brown, yellow, gold and silver. Lava fits in with that splendor, asphalt does not.

“There are two ways to be fooled:  
One is to believe what isn't so;  
the other is to refuse to believe what is so.”  
Soren Kierkegaard

Occasionally I ask myself why I write and produce this newsletter. Is it ego (dreaded word)? I am not sure, I hope not. In part of course it is an ongoing correspondence with friends. In parts it helps me clarify my own thinking and feeling. I know myself well enough by now to know that I need a lot of alone-time,

I also like to write (which allows me to carefully edit the thoughts and feelings that careen through my awareness).

Perhaps at some point in time I may put my reflections on the internet, a grain of sand in the delightfully lawless unbounded beach that is the internet. We here on this island know only too well that a beach is not a permanent feature of the landscape. Beaches come and go. A slight change in ocean currents may remove all sand and leave rocks, and another change may create a beach where rocks were before. Here we have few white sand beaches (coral) but we have black sand beaches (roughly ground lava) and one green beach (ground olivine). Black sand beaches are even more impermanent than white sand beaches on a volcanic island, flowing lava ‘eats’ the land from time to time, and creates new land where there was ocean.

The internet too changes and grows and shrinks constantly — nothing is permanent.

For now I prefer to send out this newsletter to whoever asks for it. I imagine/hope that Mixed Magic reaches people who will read it (eventually), and I think some of you perhaps share it with others, pass it on.

As any writer I hope my writing surprises you, wakes you up, makes you think... And hopefully you also get a taste of my increasing sense of amazement and awe for our wonderful world where everything is connected to everything—if one can imagine that. After years of alienation, I now live in a world where I am no longer alien, because I am in it, of it.

When I wrote the book my deepest motivation was to share that with ‘civilization’ we gained computers and fast food and plastic and antibiotics and even ‘democracy’, but we lost some simple qualities that would have made it all work better. One thing we lost is ‘knowing’ that the world as we found it a million years ago, and still today, is an immensely complex whole of rock, water, plants, animals, and people and...

The world we ourselves created, on the other hand, is not grown, but made, and although it is complex, its complexity is different, because each machine we create and each law we make is added to the whole, usually without thought of other parts we created earlier. The man-made world is patched together like a quilt — a crazy quilt!

Our man-made world is not just machines, of course, it is woven around our ideas of what is ‘real’. We firmly believe—a belief that is constantly reinforced—that we, humans, are different from Nature and that we ‘own’ this planet and can do with it what we will. We no longer know in our very bones that we are part of this planet.

If we still had a sense of being one with everything, for instance, we could not destroy rainforests because even bulldozer drivers would ‘know’ that by pushing down a tree for no reason other than money (an almost meaningless abstraction) they would hurt themselves and their offspring. If we really felt in touch with each other as part of all Life, we could not kill each

other — their pain would be ours.

The world as we created it, the world I call Disneyland, is based on assumptions about what is real. We are taught, told and reminded constantly that the world is made of matter, and that all of the world 'belongs' to us. In the other world, the world of Nature, matter is just another form of energy, and I cannot own anything, because it is already me.

One of my favorite examples of the magical mysteries that our planet is so full of is this. There are animals that rely on one species of plants for their survival. The plant, in return, relies on that one species of animal for its reproduction. In Hawai'i there is (or was) an interesting little bird that has an extremely thin, extremely curved beak. The beak would prevent this little bird from eating at my bird feeder, for instance. The only source of food for that bird is the honey in a flower that has a large, curved tube-like structure. Miraculously, the flower tube exactly fits the curved beak of the bird. No other bird can get to the honey in that flower, and no other flower has honey that this little bird can eat.

These two, quite literally, cannot do without each other.

Classical Darwinian theory of evolution cannot deal with this. If one is firmly convinced that all species are 'different' from each other, separate identities altogether, it is difficult to imagine that two species have evolved so in step that when the beak of the bird grew curved, the flower tube also curved (or vice versa, of course). It is difficult to imagine that two very different species could have evolved so intimately connected.

If, on the other hand, you believe that the flower and the bird are both part of the whole, then it is not remarkable that two very 'different' species (whatever that means in an all-is-one world) must be thought of as one aspect of the whole. The bird and the plant form a one-ness within the larger oneness of Nature.

For western man that is a difficult point of view. I know. Only now am I learning to truly understand that the trees, plants, grasses and mosses and algae of the little section of the All that I call my garden are not really separate at all. Western gardeners create 'order' in their gardens, spending endless hours removing 'weeds' (plants that grow where we do not want them to grow), planting vegetables and flowers in neat rows, changing and manipulating the soil, perhaps creating a totally controlled hydroponic environment.

I encourage the variety that I find because I know that the more complex the ecology, the stronger it is. Many people here go to great length to destroy moss in order to get a 'good lawn' — I like and encourage mosses, and the many varieties of fascinating little plants called 'ground cover', and so I am discovering that grasses can coexist with all that richness.

For me standing with my back against a tree is like re-charging the batteries. I often walk with my eyes on the ground where a fantastic wealth of what people call weeds grows. Every leaf a little different, each the manifestation of the One, connected in the All. Like a multi-dimensional spider web where if you touch even one strand it affects the entire web.

Humans are strange creatures... It is easier to re-learn the feeling of one-ness with plants at first. After experiencing that magical inclusiveness with plants I can feel one with people... victims as well as murderers!



A long time ago, on a trip back from somewhere further south, I stopped at Pago Pago, the capital of American Samoa. While waiting for an ongoing flight home to Honolulu, I dropped in on my friends in Public Health. As many Samoans, the Chief Nurse was large, with a large voice. When she



saw me, she burst out in a mixture of laughing and yelling.

"Hey Doc, wanna go on a little field trip with us," she asked? There was a small island not far away, Aunu'u, with a population of perhaps a hundred people, she explained. The public health people had decided that Aunu'u needed flush toilets. Until now, of course, the island's people had used the shoreline (the island was very rocky and had no beaches) — twice a day the tide would remove whatever was there.

We were to leave early the next morning: 'very early, before daybreak', she said. Before leaving, however, I had a chance to ask why flush toilets? I do not think she had an answer, but we both understood that to Americans, who have an unnatural horror of human waste, the idea of using available natural facilities was offensive.

As it turned out, the idea was not practical. In order to have a flush toilet, there had to be 'approved' waste disposal, and a source of water. Those projects required considerable capital. Digging a cesspool in rock is expensive. Building a water storage facility at the highest point on the island that would catch enough rain water to flush a few toilets, also turned out to be difficult and expensive. After a hole had been dug and a water

system of sorts was put in place, there was just enough money left to put four toilets side by side in one spot on the island. The people of Aunu'u did not live in a village, however, they were widely scattered over the available land. The four toilets served a few people, the rest did what they did before. Then the toilets attracted flies, something they had never had before. And a year later, four abandoned toilets stood as monuments to our obsession with making over the world in our image.

But that all happened later. We took off in a small motor boat. Besides the Chief Nurse and myself, there were four or five people in our party, and two people to run the boat. The seas ran quite a bit higher than our boat, so we ran at an angle to the waves. The boat made the most disconcerting circular dipping and waving motions. I remembered advice someone had given me a long time ago, on another boat trip, Always look at the horizon, they said, you won't get seasick. We could see the horizon only occasionally, and then always at an impossibly steep angle. Instead we looked at Nurse, who sat on the roof of the little cabin and led us in rousing Samoan song. Samoans are used to small boats and large waves. Loud singing prevents seasickness.

When we arrived, our boat bobbing on the waves, some distance from shore, a few local people came out in canoes to ferry us ashore, one by one. The little canoes tended to get swamped every now and then. After all, they were probably one person vessels, and carrying two people through rough surf to a very rocky shore would strain the capacity of sturdier craft.

Samoans are not only hearty, they love formal ritual. Every project starts with a kava ceremony. Kava, or 'ava as it is called in Hawai'i, is a drink made from the root of a plant, used by all Polynesian people in similar ceremonies. Americans may classify kava as a 'drug'—to Americans all plant products that give one a buzz are thought to be drugs—although the most kava will do is give you a numb tongue. It is also a diuretic. During a kava ceremony, chiefs and important visitors sit on mats, sometimes in a roofed building, in Aunu'u in the open air. Young girls handed half coconut shell with the muddy brew to each of person in turn. There is strict protocol, of course: the host (probably the highest chief of the island) is the first to get kava. He gives a speech. Then the next highest chief, or visitor, and so on down the line. Each person drinks the kava offered him or her, pours a little of the dregs on the ground, loudly proclaims Manu'ia (a toast), and then gives a long, flowery, rambling speech in which he expresses delight at attending this important occasion, feeling most honored to be with so many honored and famous people, attending the initial steps of a wonderful and valuable project that will live forever in the memory of all Samoans ... I doubt that it is the kava—the amount each person gets to drink is minimal—I rather think it is the honor and praise that is passed around that makes people feel good!

This was a small group, but people gave long speeches. The people of this island probably did not get many visitors, this was an occasion to cherish. Eventually, the kava cup came to me. I was a visitor who had no role to play in the installation or even the planning of the toilets, but I was a professor at the University of Hawaii, and some Samoans look to Hawaii as their entry to the rest of the world — it may well be.

When my turn came to speak, I said *Manu'ia*, and made a speech. Probably the briefest speech that had been given! I knew it was correct to repeat what everyone had said before me, so I also was honored to be here, and to be part, albeit marginally, of such an important project. I added that, because I had no role to play in the project, I would have time to see the island. I would be pleased and honored, I said, to have someone show me around. My special interest, I said as a sort of aside, was to learn about 'native healing practices'.

There was an embarrassed silence after my little speech, I thought. Perhaps I had not spoken long enough, perhaps mine was a rudely short speech. But I could not think what more to say...

After the ceremony, I was asked what 'native healing' meant. I explained that I was quite sure that people who had lived on this island for many hundreds of years certainly would have learned that, for instance, tea made from certain leaves would relieve stomach cramps, or that a certain kind of massage might help muscle spasms. Probably people knew that sea water was healing.

Of course people here knew well enough how to deal with ordinary sicknesses and accidents right here. "Oh that," he said, "yes, some people..." He would be my guide.

We walked around the island. I made notes of everything I heard and saw, until I felt that my notebook worried people. We visited an old woman who knew about herbs, she made teas and infusions. She also knew how to make very effective poultices to heal infections, she said after a moment's hesitation. A man on the other side of the island knew how to set a bone so that it would heal relatively straight. Two middle-aged sisters, living together in stark isolation, halfway to the top of the island, knew how to help women with a difficult childbirth. When they felt safe and I had assured them that I would not report them to the authorities, they added that sometimes they also healed by laying on of hands. Other people knew other herbs, many people knew massage and other ways of healing. My guide had become more friendly with each visit. I met his wife, a grown son, the son's wife and their young son. We had a meal, the family sharing what they had, with dignity and love.

Late afternoon I rejoined the public health people. When we were ready to leave—I was already seated in the canoe that would take me to our boat—my guide came wading through the rough surf with a tightly rolled-up mat in his arms. Samoans and other Polynesians give finely woven mats as gifts. A Samoan Fine Mat is made out of the same pandanus leaves that the mats are made of that some of us have on the floor, but a Fine Mat, made of very fine and narrow strips, feels almost like cloth. Needless to say, traditional Fine Mats have become a rarity. This was not a 'fine mat', my guide explained, and smaller than traditional Samoan gift mats should be. But it was all he had, and he wanted me to have it.

"You first palangi (white person) say somethings we have is worth," he said before he waded back to shore.

On the way back Nurse led the singing again, but now she chose quiet, reflective songs, more appropriate for the darkness of the ocean around us. I listened to songs and feathery sounds of waves, clutching the precious mat to my heart. Yes, I thought, that is how we eradicate species and cultures, by our arrogant contempt for what is other.

And a second thought: ignorance hiding in arrogance.



I have never wanted to see the movie 'Schindler's List', afraid that seeing scenes from The War would... loosen memories, bring back feelings I do not particularly want to re-live. One evening, a few weeks ago, our cable network showed the entire movie, without interruptions. Almost from the beginning I found I could watch only small fragments of the movie at a time. Yes, it moved me, it brought back vivid memories of that time. And that, of course, made me realize that what I saw was not what an average movie goer would see.

Before and after, Steven Spielberg talked about how important it is not to forget! What is it we need to remember? Man's inhumanity to man? Why do we need to see three and a half hours of pictures of arrogant men casually killing people? It is not possible, I believe, to witness a killing and not be affected. Seeing endless murders on a movie screen, for three and a half hours, is gruesome. I imagine that many people saw a picture, not unlike the pictures we see daily on TV, on the news. Why another murder story, even if it is presented with a message?

Does seeing a wrecked car shock us into driving more safely? Yes, for a few minutes, probably. In the five years of our war in Europe I witnessed arrogant men casually shooting down the woman standing two feet away from me, I witnessed an infant... never mind. Such experiences in the endless years of War scored deep wounds in my soul. I can never touch a gun again, nor would I want to. The movie, I believe, cannot have the effect of my memories. But even if the movie leaves people genuinely moved, horrified, shocked into awareness — does that prevent people from being arrogant murderers in another world, another time? No.

I could not watch 'Schindler's List' the movie after all. I saw the beginning; I saw the end. Then for probably an hour or more I sat frozen, not moving, trying not to feel, not to think.

One thought remained: **This is the human condition.** We fool ourselves if we think that what happened in Nazi Germany was unusual. It happens all the time. It still happens, in Zaire, in Pakistan, Serbia, even in this country...

Why do we, humans, feel so passionately about differences? Anton Chekhov said, Man is what he believes.

Why not, then, feel passionately about oneness!

No, we are not other.

We, humans, are as much an indivisible part of nature as a rock, or the last surviving tiger. The air we breathe has been breathed by all beings that use oxygen, and breathed over and over again. The air we exhale is used by plants to make more oxygen. Our molecules are recycled through everything. The water of our earth is part of us and in us, and circulates through us. The fire of the sun energizes the entire earth, and its biosphere, which is all life.

Then why did we create the civilization we have constructed? I see our civilization (and an exploding number of humans) spread everywhere, every last nook or cranny of this earth, eating up what was there, making it over in our image. Like a cancer. I mourn the damage we are doing to the planet, but I know the planet will heal. With or without us.

What is most frightening about our civilization is that it does not tolerate anything outside itself. We have created a civilization which forces us to be who we are not. Fashions and fads force us to clothe ourselves a certain way, civilization forces us to think, feel, be. Perhaps like fashion, this too will pass in time?

There are voices today who say that our casual ruthlessness as we plunder everything and everyone around us for a few bucks is a sign of being asleep, unconscious. Wake up, they say. Only when we are awake—and aware—can we change. Perhaps.

Others tell us that help is on the way, in the forms of beings from other planets, or other dimensions, or God himself who will set things aright.

Laurens van der Post is a writer whose work I much admire. He was a South African who spent much of his life learning from the Bushmen, an aboriginal people. In one of his books he tells about the experiences of white settlers who tried to employ Bushmen, who might work for a day but then disappear. If a Bushmen were jailed for even a minor infraction of some incomprehensible rule, he would die. The coroner would report that death came about 'through no known medical cause'. Van der Post quotes a farmer, '...Bushman! They cannot be tamed!'

The concept of tame humans describes modern man well. We are tamed by our parents, teachers, a million man-made laws and regulations, and recently most effectively by the Media. No wonder the word 'freedom' is important to us who do not have much of it. The opposite of 'tame' is wild. My dictionary has two column inches on the meaning of wild, and all start with a negative: growing without man's intervention (is that possible?), uninhabited and uncultivated by man, uncivilized, unrestrained by caution or convention,— and without a break the column continues—suggesting near madness, out of control, completely undisciplined... and at least a dozen more. Clearly the dictionary does not approve of things not man-made, or controlled.

My definition of wild might include the first few definitions, but would also include being awake. The Bushmen needed to know— and feel completely in tune with every aspect of the desert, the endless miles of dry sand, the hot and fickle winds, whiffs of smell — and only when you can read all the signs, can you know where to find food, water and some shelter. In their world one must listen, in our world it seems we must know how to yell.

From experience I know that when one has (re-)learned to be in and part of an environment, being around great numbers of civilized humans is a painful overdose of crude and loud stimuli, overwhelming any sensitivities one might have had. It made me physically ill until I learned how to ignore most of the din (much as I learned to live with that annoying hiss in my ears!)

I am growing more wild as I grow old; wild meaning mindfully awake, listen...

## #6

After what seems like weeks of rain the sun is back! I bask in the light. This morning did a wash, knowing that the sun and the wind would dry things. My little house is a one-room cottage. A bathroom and a place where the machines are that keep me clean and healthy were added later. The machine room — as I think of it — houses a double granite sink, an apartment-sized washer with a dryer on top, something that could have been a book case but now is used for storing garden tools, and on top of that a small refrigerator, the water heater tank and the pump that pumps water into my house from the storage tank outside. Not much space is left to walk, and the outside door does not open very far, but it all works — most of the time).

This morning I noticed that a rodent had visited ‘my’ space (the engine room has a roof, but the walls and the floor are slats. I got on my hands and knees to get rid of the dark turds, each the shape of a long rice kernel, then I washed the mat that covers some of the floor with soap. When I was satisfied that it was as clean as it should be, I made a big fuss about washing my hands — rat droppings ‘carry disease’, I remembered.

Yes, of course. We are all in this together, all life is connected, everything is connected to everything else... All of us are inhabited by many other beings. There are organisms that make their home in and on us, and organisms that eat us, still others eat what is indigestible to us, and excrete what we can use as nutrient. Most of the time—or perhaps I should say, for quite a while—all these organisms do well together, until the whole bundle of different manifestations of Life dissolves to form and re-form other bundles.

This is the century of hygiene and cleanliness, all so that we not be ‘infected’ with some of the many bugs that are all around. Bad bugs are ‘the enemy’, who must be eradicated, as we eradicate everything we have no use for. In our zeal to eradicate what is ‘dangerous’, what does not please us, or nowadays what is not immediately profitable, we are supposed to live in sterile isolation from the dirt that is the earth. Most people would be surprised to know that it is surprisingly difficult to know who are the good bugs and who the bad!

My garden—a well-loved part of the rain forest here—continues to educate me. I see how different species not only live side by side but also in and on each other. Every tree has another plant or tree living on it, or moss, or one or more of a large variety of ferns — not even to mention the beetles and bees and spiders and the other insects I cannot see. The ‘ohi’a trees have tree ferns growing on them, and the tree ferns have ‘ohi’a trees growing in them. Those

two obviously get along well enough, at least in their youth.

At some point one shrugs off the other. It is easy to see that in this ecosystem (very thin soil, lots of rain and sunshine) 'ohi'as and tree ferns often help each other get a start. Large sprays of orchids find space for their roots in the 'arm pits' of tree ferns. The orchids do well, and the tree ferns do not seem to be harmed. Many smaller plants grow on tree ferns, and many others grow on and in the mosses that cover fallen tree ferns and 'ohi'a.

Since I began encouraging moss and discouraging grass in my lawn (well, not really a 'lawn', more a wonderfully variegated green that covers the ground), an amazing number of plants, tiny ferns and mosses show up everywhere. I have not counted the number of different plants, but there must be a few dozen species happily living together. I never use so-called weed-killers nor would I use chemicals designed to kill moss (or kill anything, for that matter).

I shall watch this lawn and see what happens over time: sort of a control study.



The people I call 'aboriginal', people who still consider themselves part of the web of life that covers our earth, know well that they harbor other creatures in and on their bodies. They know that fleas and ticks happily jump from dogs to humans (and back). Aboriginal peoples who have dogs (and sometimes other pets, such as pigs) include them in their daily grooming routine.

Many animals groom each other. Apes and monkeys—the most human-looking of animals patiently search each other's skin for fleas and other beasties. I have seen people groom their dogs and I saw a monkey groom his owner. Grooming is a sign that they care for and take care of each other.

We are too civilized to groom each other today. We get rid of fleas with lethal preparations that do the killing for us — but, please do not mention fleas in polite company!

Today grooming is what a barber does (I know less of 'beauticians'). The barber stands, I sit in a special chair that swivels and leans back. The first thing the barber does is cover my body with a white sheet (nowadays perhaps a cool pastel-colored sheet), to make it clear that he is 'professional'. The white sheet suggests that this is a 'sterile' operation. Like a surgeon, the barber isolates what she is going to work on: only the hair of the head, nothing else. And if the barber gives a shampoo, it is a brisk, quick, professional massage — no leisurely touch. What animals and 'primitive' people do has become embarrassingly

‘intimate’ to us. The price of civilization!

Can we even imagine the bonding that occurs between beings—from the same or different species—who lovingly, patiently and regularly touch each other’s skin? We lost much when we set ourselves apart from the rest of creation. Is it worth it?



Cleaning up rat poop I briefly wondered about animals who obviously have no control over their sphincters: rodents, birds, fishes. Dogs can be trained to do ‘it’ outside; cats have less control, we think, but they can be trained to use the sanitized toilet many people provide for them (saw a cat box advertised that costs \$200 and ‘automatically’ sweeps the shit away after each use). Body wastes, we think, are shameful.

To us control over our instinctual behaviors has become the badge of being civilized. The first thing a baby learns is control over her/his sphincters; fortunately, most humans learn that easily in the normal course of growing up. But, of course, we are careful to swathe babies in all kinds of sometimes natural but mostly artificial material to absorb what every mother carefully wraps to hide its ‘ickiness’.

So too we learn to control our ‘urges’. We have come a long way from ‘exposing’ ourselves to each other, as so-called primitive people do without self-consciousness. Touch has acquired ‘meanings’. Holding hands means something, caressing means something else, kissing means something else again (kissing, in fact, can mean different things at different times and different occasions). But no natural behaviors are innocent any more. Natural is no longer innocent?

Are there studies about the effect diapers might have on the normal growth of human infants? As many parents know too well, diapers encourage rashes and other damp heat-related conditions in babies. Do we know whether diapers restrict normal movement of the legs and so influences how we learn to walk? If nothing else, diapers give the message that everything ‘down there’ is ‘dirty’.



When I first left home to go to another continent my father took me aside for fatherly advice (I half expected to be told about the birds and the bees, but my father knew well enough that at 16 that would have been too late). We talked a little about money, but I do not remember much of what surely was sage

advice. Then he said, 'when traveling, if you stay in a place longer than two weeks, by all means drink the water.'

In time I learned that this was the distillation of a great deal of knowledge and wisdom. My father was a bacteriologist and a virologist; he worked in what later became known as public health. He had learned first-hand, in conditions we now would call primitive, that it is not only unrealistic but unnecessary to expect people to live sterile lives, that sources of infections are all around us all the time, and that the best way to stay reasonably healthy is to have a well-functioning immune system.

A few years later the first 'anti-biotic' (penicillin) was discovered, by accident. Some years after that it became possible and immensely profitable to mix other potions that would kill specific micro organisms. For a while these anti-life potions worked so well

that we thought it would only be a matter of time before all disease would be eradicated. Even at the height of the antibiotic success story my father never believed that we would ever eradicate all disease. 'That would be completely unnatural,' he said. From my perspective we have become increasingly unnatural.

We have designed into our world endless reminders that we are other, we are not part of Nature, but its masters. What strange conceit.



We had a discussion about lying the other day. Well, to be honest, it was not really much of a 'discussion', we disagreed, to put it mildly. One of the women disagreed with the other woman, they filled the room with a rapid back and forth. The other man did not say much but we knew he disagreed with everyone by his superior smirk. I tried to make the point that lying is not a natural human behavior. Lying is another creation of civilization. When we lived in the jungle, or the tundras of Siberia, or the African Veld, there was no room for lies. We would not have survived long if we had not been honest with ourselves and others about what the world was like. The person who hunts and eats and sleeps and sits around with her tribal brothers and sisters all day and all night, with all our children, and the few elders who are still with us — how can one lie?

It is unthinkable that a remembered genealogy, passed from father to son, to his son, could possibly be 'wrong'. So too the stories we tell each other at dusk: they cannot be lies, stories help us remember what happened.

Today we live in a world of lies. Advertisements lie — they are designed to tell only part of the truth, they are researched to influence us to believe something that the advertisers expect us to make true! Three out of four doctors do



something or other (really?), Cigarettes do not contain nicotine? — or, if they do, nicotine is not addicting. Oh, really? This car is roomier, wider, shorter, better (than what?). What can an advertiser say about soap that has not been said before about any soap?



People tell me to get off my soap box, have some fun, relax, don't worry. It is hard for me to imagine that they do not 'worry', as they call it. Surely they can see that the world of today is not a very nice world any more (and 'nice' is the kind of word they would use).

There are people who believe that the experts will fix it; they really believe that science can solve all our problems.

The scientists I know do not think that. Science can (and does) tell us what the consequences are of our passion for controlling the earth, but scientists have not learned how to change human behavior. By now, most educated people can read facts and figures about our changing weather patterns, facts and figures about the destruction of our ecosphere, they can tell us how many species of plants and animals we have eradicated today.

And we, who think we are so smart: none of that information has changed what we do.

Then there are people who believe that space beings will come to rescue us from our own insanity, or lift us to the next stage of spiritual existence. I cannot believe that humans are so unique in the universe that there would not be other beings, some smarter, some less smart. It does not make much sense to think that smarter aliens waited till now to stop us. Why now? I expect smarter beings to avoid our Earth. It is only too easy to imagine the damage humans would do if they were let loose in the universe now!

And there are people who say that things are much better than 50 years ago, and they predict that things will be better 50 years from now. Yes, some of us live like royalty, with more than enough to eat, a comfortable place to live, the freedom and the wherewithal to travel when and where we want... But are these people not a very small percentage of the world's population? The statistics I have seen say that the majority of all children in our world are starving. Whole nations are killing each other with weapons kindly provided by us, weapons a lot more sophisticated and deadly than those of 50 years ago.

Somehow I cannot escape the notion that I live well because many others do not. I am able to buy gadgets made in China; the Chinese who make my gadget

probably could not afford to buy it, even in their own country. A 'cheap' shirt I wear is made by a child in India or Korea.

Friends remind me that I only have a short time left on this earth, so why not sit back and enjoy the sunshine, the incredible beauty, complexity and spirit that is in the plants and trees around me? Why not sit on my little porch and enjoy... How can I?



A Hawaiian friend told me that his family has lived on this land for thirteen generations. We looked out over a calm green valley, with blue shadows, and birds everywhere. He said 'thirteen' with a twinkle in his eyes, as if it to say, it could have been fourteen or a hundred generations.

He did not mean that his family 'owned' this valley, but rather that his family had an unbreakable bond with this land, they belonged together. Today his family no longer 'owns' it, in fact they are forbidden to set foot on this land. But, he said, he and his family are still one with this land. And, he said as if to prove his point, 'everybody knows that this is my family's land.'

More than a hundred years ago, a distant uncle had given the land to a haole. The uncle almost certainly meant that the white man could live there if he wanted. But as it was recorded in the books and registers a modern state must maintain, the white had acquired a legal 99-year lease for which he paid a dollar a year to the uncle and his heirs. The lease expired. The family who 'owned' the land probably did not even know there was such a piece of paper, or someone may have 'renewed' the lease without informing them. Since then it has changed hands several times, each time for a higher price, now in the many thousands of dollars. But to my Hawaiian friend this land and his family were still connected.

The family tried, but could never 'prove' that this was their land — white men do not understand what it was a Hawaiian family could claim if not 'property', duly recorded and registered. Hawaiians do not understand how one can 'own' land. Land cannot be owned as property.

Of course when my friend talked about his 'family' he did not mean father, mother, brothers and sisters. His 'ohana was that web of forebears, aunties, uncles cousins, parents, siblings and probably adopted children and adopted adults — all of who had been part of this oneness that included their land.

In my mind's eye I can imagine the very first Hawaiians sighting land after weeks of travel over an empty ocean (the Pacific covers one third of the earth's

surface). They must have yearned for something under foot that did not move up and down and sideways all the time. I see the first people wade to shore and kiss the ground. Holy ground, 'land'.

Of course they could not 'own' that land. If anything, the land owned them. These islands sustained them, fed them, nurtured them, provided shelter — the land that was their very life for more than a thousand years.

Today these different points of view continue. Our world is based on ownership, on a paper government, on endless records (or have written records now been replaced with digitally recorded pips on a disk?)

Ownership is a strange and perfidious concept. The earliest European explorers formally 'took possession' of an island or a continent they 'discovered', in the name of

an authority, the Church, their king, queen or emperor. As time went on, the state owned all that was on and in this land they had appropriated. A modern state 'owns' what can be mined from under the surface of the earth, and the air space above its territory.

Now we do not hesitate to own land, or the plants and animals that live on it. Not all that long ago we owned people. Many parents believed they 'owned' their children. We believe that spouses 'own' each other (a spouse is the only one who can give permission for a medical procedure if the other spouse is unconscious). We own our creations (words, paintings, ideas). Countries own the sea out to many miles from their shores. Today we are debating whether we own such intangibles as privacy, or own the right to say what we want.

My genealogy goes back more than 13 generations. My earliest ancestors, I have been told, were pirates on the North Sea. I have no idea whether they considered the land they lived on as property. But of course in the intervening years my forefathers and mothers undoubtedly owned land and other property which they passed on to their children and grandchildren. But I am fairly sure that buying land is a new invention. When there is no money, can there be ownership?



On a Saturday afternoon, after a busy day, sat down and watched TV. Looked at a movie, a generic version of How The West Was Won, with soulful 'prairie music' and a casual shooting every few minutes, then lingering close-ups of the slow crumpling of yet another dead body. It brought to mind one of the Laws of Economics: Bad Money Drives Out Good Money.

Very much the same was and is happening in Hawai'i. White people came and stayed, missionaries came to preach and ended up marrying royalty and so 'owning' much of these islands. The second and third generation missionaries became rich business people who formed an illegal government, and took over. The white people brought in slave labor from China, Japan and other parts of Asia to do the dirty work of making money for the white man.

During the last fifty years Hawai'i made itself into a world-wide 'destination'. White beaches and palm trees, 'hula girls' in plastic grass skirts. Almost 50 years ago these islands were 'strategic', meaning a good place to park a navy. Now that planes have grown larger and have a longer range, Hawai'i is losing its importance as a link between the US and Asia: it is easier and cheaper to fly non-stop from Chicago to Tokyo and tourists find it cheaper to go elsewhere.

Many people got rich from Hawai'i, most of them lived elsewhere, in New York or Japan. Perhaps now, at the end of the century, when tourists and soldiers no longer

need Hawai'i, these islands will revert back to the descendants of her first people. When Captain Cook 'discovered' this island he found an estimated half a million happy and incredibly healthy people here. Less than a century later a census counted less than 50,000 Hawaiians on all islands. Hawaiians are generous and shared their land and themselves. Most of today's 'Hawaiians' are part this and part that, yet even after two hundred years the essence of a Polynesian way of life survives.



The story of these islands is not unique. There are hundreds of small and large countries that were visited, exploited for a century or so, and thrown away when western man had no further use of it. That story is much on my mind these days. I have seen what western civilization has done to peoples around the world. We gave the natives colored beads or computers, a bureaucracy, even 'democracy', but we have stolen their culture, their soul.

I feel a great sense of guilt about that. That is the real white man's burden. Our burden is our emptiness inside. Now is the time for us to realize that this emptiness cannot be filled with stolen goods.

Our emptiness is our civilization. The world we have created has moved farther and farther from our roots. Writing destroyed our oral traditions; for some strange reason we think writing is 'true' and oral histories are just stories when, in fact, it is the reverse. Our inventiveness created mechanized transportation

that destroyed the extended families. Cities destroyed intimacy. Property led to greed which destroyed our dignity. We have traded our heritage as beings of this earth for toasters. Now we sit in the middle of all our toys, empty of soul.

I applaud and support the work (and it is work!) of finding, or re-finding one's roots, the stories, the language, the traditions. And when now some people carefully reconstruct the shreds we have left them into a living culture, I must stay out of the way.

James Thurber, who I associated with funny animal stories, wrote

*Let's not look back in anger, or forward in fear, but around in awareness.*



I try not to make my garden into a reflection of 'me'; I cherish what wants to grow here and where it wants to grow. Imported plants I keep in hanging pots.

Almost daily, however, I patrol the edges of my garden to remove kahili ginger starts. Kahili ginger is a tough plant with large, beautiful flowers, that in this climate is extremely aggressive. Purist ecologists want to eradicate all non-native species of plants and animals, because they threaten the fragile ecologies of these islands. And white people? Aren't they imports?

14 April 1997

## #7

In The New York Times of May 3, 1997 (available on the internet) I came across an article, *The Earth Does a Slow Burn*, by Bill McKibben, author of among others “Hope, Human and Wild: True Stories of Living Lightly on the Earth”. He reports findings of the growing number of scientific studies that document what has been called ‘global warning’. The author concludes: Eight years ago, James Hansen, the NASA scientist who has used his computer model of the climate to make the most prescient forecasts about global warming, predicted that by the late 1990’s the effects of global warming would become apparent. For eight years I’ve believed this was true, and still this spring’s flood of new data shocks and scares me. All the things that people said would happen if we did not clean up our act are actually happening.

This is a new planet, not the earth we were born on.

So far Mr. McKibben. That the earth is not the earth we were born on must be evident to anyone older than 20 I would think. By now we must know that the changes are mostly man-made — and we also know that we are not doing much to change our destructive behaviors.



I have lived in Volcano for many years. From the first I was intrigued with the ‘ohi’a forest. Rain forest, yes, but not hot and humid. It is damp and cool at this altitude. All kinds of ferns grow here, and countless kinds of mosses. The ‘ohi’a forests do not have much undergrowth, except where it was clear cut some time ago (so-called second growth forest). Along the edges of the forest other plants, many of them brought in from elsewhere, seem poised to take over (as for instance one kind of ginger, which at this altitude is an aggressive invader rather than the decorative garden plant of coastal areas).

Very early in my explorations I came across a mysterious little plant that here usually grows in the bark of tree ferns, a plant the Hawaiians call ‘moa’ (*Psilotum nudum*, or *P. complanatum* Sw.). Moa is also the Hawaiian word for chicken — one explanation of the name of this plant is that its stem has sections that are rough to the touch; people say it feels like a chicken leg...

All my life I have had special feelings for plants I think, but it took many years to admit to myself (and now to others) that I ‘talk with’ plants. Perhaps ‘talk to’ is not the right term, I relate to plants, and often they ‘let me know’ who they are, what they need.

I try to find out where a certain plant wants to live when I bring it into my garden. My garden looks as if the plants have been there always. I do not like formal gardens.

I have always known, I think, that each plant species has a unique ‘spirit’, an essence that sometimes speaks to me as a face, more often as a color, or a complex of thoughts and feelings that together make up this ‘spirit’ of a plant. There have been times when I was traveling when a plant, otherwise unknown to me, suddenly spoke to me. From many feet away I knew what it

felt like, smelled like, and what its healing qualities are. I am convinced that is not an unusual capability, I am sure other humans must have that same capacity for communicating with the spirit of a plant — that is, after all, how people learned what the healing and nutritive values of plants are.

I do not know why moa ‘speaks to me’, in fact it is almost an obsession! Moa is a very modest plant, the opposite of showy. To many people it is almost invisible.

Up here it is small perhaps 4-5 inches high, closer to the sea it grows a little taller. Usually I see it grow in the bark of hapu’u, so that it droops down. Moa has flat, dark green stems, that are made up of sections. It has no leaves, no flowers, and, in fact, no roots — it gets nourishment and water with the help of a fungus. The flat stems branch in the simplest branching pattern there is: one into two, an inch further up again one into two. It spreads by spores contained in tiny yellow pods that appear seemingly at random along the stems.

Moa is a very ancient plant, “it is believed to be one of the few surviving species of ancient stock, that of the oldest known land plants, said to have thrived more than 350 million years ago and found today only as ancient fossils.”<sup>2</sup>

Years ago I discovered that often I could tell where moa was before actually seeing it. Not infrequently I could tell someone, There is moa ‘over there’ and to the surprise of the person who had lived on that land for a long time here was a plant he had never seen before. Moa grows everywhere in the tropics.

Hawaiians consider it a medicinal plant, it is a ‘purge’, and probably has other medicinal qualities as well.

I could not find out much more information about this plant from books, or even from other people, but I know that from the first I felt a strong attraction to this little plant.

Now that I have accepted that it is alright to communicate with plants, I have paid particular attention to moa. Almost immediately when I reached out in my mind, I saw a face, the face of a very old man, very dark skin, wrinkled, eyes sunken — ‘blind eyes’ I thought at first. The eyes looked into some far distance, not interested in me, or in humankind for that matter.

But I kept trying... One day I did my most powerful meditation, a meditation that requires a day or more of preparation and purification. I had a sprig of moa on my altar. I went into a trance and sought out the spirit of moa.

This time I did not see the wrinkled face, I saw... a very large globe, featureless, almost abstract. I thought of this sphere as in deep space. It seemed enormous although of course I had no way of estimating its size in relation to me? the earth? a star? It felt closed, impenetrable. The surface of the globe was a dull grey, or more accurately no color at all. It was as if the surface absorbed light without reflecting it.

Very forbidding! I felt rejected, not welcome.

Still in a meditative state I observed the mysterious globe of something not material, certainly unearthly, for what seemed a long time. When I felt I could not learn more from observing, I almost regretfully turned away. At the very last moment there was a crack (?) in the surface of that globe and a tiny (the size of my little finger?) pseudopod reached out in my direction. The pseudopod was a pale ivory, more organic looking than the sphere.

I hesitated a moment. Should I reach out and touch it?

No, I withdrew. I had a sense that if I had touched it, something like a strong electric current

would have hit me, either giving me a jolt of great insight, or killing me. I felt intimidated, perhaps scared and not quite ready to die.

For some months that was as close as I came to making contact with the spirit of moa. I did not do the meditation again, although a few times I put a sprig of moa under my pillow (dark, dark dreams!). And whenever I looked at the little plants in my garden, I wondered.

Perhaps I missed my chance to communicate by turning back at the last moment? I was not sure. I touched the moa growing in the hapu'u, trying to feel something... I decided that one day, I must try again.

Eliot Cowan, whose book, *Plant Medicine Spirit*, helped me to accept that—of course—communing with plants is alright, mentions that sometimes it is useful to ask the spirit of a plant that has become known to us, to 'intercede' in our behalf. I have felt particularly close to the spirit of the little plantain, the plant the Hawaiians call *laukahi kuahiwi*. To me it is a cheerful, youthful spirit, not very complex perhaps but very friendly. I 'discovered' this humble weed when I realized that every time I walked in a certain part of my garden I started to smile, I felt happy — when I looked down it was as if the little green leaf smiled at me from the grass! I now have a patch of *laukahi* growing where the lawn mower does not mow it down! It was the *laukahi* spirit that introduced me to the spirit of orchid.

I asked the spirit of *laukahi* to introduce me to the spirit of moa. It declined. I asked other plant spirits, they ignored my request.

Yet I knew that I had to keep trying.



With age come aches and pains. Often different aches on two successive days, each day has its own collection of malfunctions and discomforts. An excellent time for reflection!

I feel blessed. This life has given me much, I have learned much, I have seen much, I have felt much. I have made wonderful friends, and a few enemies. I have been very lucky, and I am grateful for that. And through my reflections I see a thread, a path. My path has frequently led me away from the excitement of civilization, to seek peace and quiet among trees. I have been attracted to simple people rather than to very complex and intellectual people — strange perhaps, because I am a thinking person myself.

Now, in my old age, I feel myself more and more alienated from civilization. As I have written in this newsletter before, I do not understand why we, humans, have moved so far from feeling part of nature. How can we forget our Mother?

How can we feel that we are in control? I do not understand that we feel we can and must 'fix' everything to our needs of the moment. It seems to me that the more civilized we become, the more dependent we are on our civilization. We eat processed food, grown half a world away. We expect 'experts' to tell us how to live, what to do — and we expect experts to fix the world we are drowning in our garbage.

It distresses me physically that we have such a casual and cruel attitude toward the living things around us (a sure sign that we feel separated from Life). I sense the pain of trees as they are felled to clear land for yet another shopping mall, or pasture for more cows so that we can eat endless hamburgers and

hot dogs. I feel the pain of plants as they are chemically eradicated (when many of our most valuable herbal medicines come from 'weeds'). I mourn for the animals we have eradicated; I



mourn the disappearance of tigers. Now, of course, it is becoming quite clear that we are harming ourselves perhaps most by harming the environment...

All that makes me sad. The earth, I am sure, will re-establish a balance again, although it may take more than a few of our generations. A new earth will be a different earth — and apparently that is already happening. I cannot help but see us, humans, rushing headlong to our own extinction, blind and deaf to the signs that are all around us. Today it is we who fiddle while the world burns. And in this frame of mind, I continued to search for the elusive spirit of moa.

A few weeks ago, again I went to bed with a tiny branch of moa under my pillow and a firm resolve to find in my dreams what I had not been able to find in meditation.



My thoughts—as I shrug a few times to make a warm nest under the blankets getting ready to go to sleep—are about the huge globe that I associate with the spirit of moa. That colorless sphere that soaks up what light and heat there is in deep space is clear and ‘real’ in my mind, and as forbidding as when I first saw it: alien and completely inhuman.

I feel very cold. My feet are so cold I cannot feel them. My arms are cold, and yet they are burning. I am very hot and very cold at the same time. Space feels empty, devoid of meaning. Not my kind of place; what am I doing here?

I remember, looking for the spirit of moa... In my awareness is nothing but that enormous sphere that I associate with the spirit of moa. I think I must lie dead still to deal with that freezing cold. I do not move a muscle. Time passes. Nothing happens. I am not moving, nothing around me changes, yet time flows. I am cold and hot at the same time.

Until I become aware that I must pee.

Shivering, cold and hot at the same time, I get out from under the blankets and sit up. Going to the bathroom and putting on socks takes a few minutes. Back in bed. The clock says a little after midnight. The first two hours of this night have felt timeless. The cold of space is still in me, as well as the heat of ... lava?

Lava, the heat of earth, flowing as if from a wound. I shiver as I get under the blankets again, only my nose outside. Still cold and hot, hot and cold.

I am in my work room, finishing some work, at home, a roomy and spacious house, familiar, comfortable. (The house in my dream is not where I live, it is not a house I have ever lived in) My work requires intense concentration, I am leaning over, deep in thought. A persistent noise is breaking into my concentration. I look up, look around the familiar surroundings of my work room. Stretch. I am gradually becoming aware of a noise elsewhere in the house. As if there are other people in the house?

Yes, definitely strange noises. People talking?

I open the door to the next room and find two men, dressed in formal-looking clothes, coat and tie — one of them wears a bowler hat!

I laugh uproariously.

The men seem so ridiculous in those funny outfits! They look straight from some old movie about the last century. Laughing, I say, Hello! What is going on?

The men take no notice, they go on with whatever it is they are doing. Preparing food? They

seem to be unpacking something.

A door at the other end of the room opens, and a man and two women walk into the room, carrying baskets. Picnic baskets?

One of the women wears a large hat, something we used to call 'garden hats', with a very wide, floppy brim and artificial flowers around the crown. The other woman has dark hair with reddish highlights, swirled into a high construction, with a large tortoise shell clasp in the back. A movie from another century.

This is really ridiculous! I laugh louder. I cannot help but laugh at these strange people.

I try to talk with them, but they do not hear me. They act as if they are not even aware I am in the room. They continue unpacking the boxes they brought in. They do not seem to hear my laughter either. Something is very strange — who are these people?

Now they are re-arranging what little furniture there is in the room. The far door opens again and more people come in, carrying long tables which they proceed to set up. There are some children who came in as well, and two cats, one very light yellow, the other a sort of mottled brown. They do not look very healthy, they act skittish.

The cats notice me! They look at me and shy away... A very dark-skinned man walks in, his face full of laugh wrinkles, his dark hair sort of woolly, greying at the temples. He looks like a very 'comfortable' sort of person. He too sees me, comes over and kisses me on the cheek — both cheeks. Welcome, he says. Welcome? But this is my house — it is I who should welcome them, if I had invited them. But I did not! Who are these people, and what are they doing here? The dark man leaves, the others stay, now busier than ever, arranging the long tables and covering them with bright cloths. I have never seen such cloths, they seem almost like water, they flow and shimmer. I am beginning to feel uneasy, something is very wrong here! I raise my voice. Hey! People! Who are you, and what are you doing in my house? What is going on? No reaction. They do not hear me. They do not see me. I walk toward them. One man, the man with the bowler hat, turns in my direction and says something that I cannot hear. I do not know whether he sees me, even now, or whether he was talking to someone behind me. Or perhaps I cannot understand what he says.

Again I raise my voice, louder this time. Hey, you, what is this? Then I say, Do not make so much noise, my family is asleep upstairs.

I grab the arm of the man with the funny hat — he looks around, surprised. Now he is taking notice! I tell him to move, get out, take your friends and your tables and move, leave. NOW! Maybe he does not speak my language, he does not understand me. He and some of the people go into another room. I follow them.

I'm getting worried, I don't know how to get rid of these people. They have invaded my house, in the middle of the night, and what are they doing? The next room has large windows all around — or maybe not windows, maybe big openings to the outside. I can see my wonderful garden. On a table in the middle of the room is a large wooden bowl with two large, warm red fruit, lying on big green leaves.

The man with the hat picks up one of the fruit and loudly complains that they are 'wrong', they are not what they need.

I am furious, speechless. I know that fruit, it is juicy and very tasty. I know the tree it grew on, right there in the corner of the garden. I brought these in yesterday, to let them ripen. This one

should be almost ready to eat . How can this fruit be ‘wrong’?

More people come in and crowd around. The man takes the bowl of fruit and walks away. I follow him. PUT THAT BOWL DOWN, I yell! He looks at me and shrugs his shoulders, puts the bowl on a narrow shelf. The bowl is too big for that shelf, it might tip over any moment so I run over, take the bowl and move it back to the center of the table. Just then the sun —the sun? but this is the middle of the night, perhaps a spotlight?— makes the fruit glow with a warm inner light...

Lava. I think of lava flowing, thick lava that turns black soon after it is exposed to air, but hot red at the edges,. Now and then a crack shows in the lava and you can see the lava almost white-hot inside the flow. Somehow the fruit captures the warmth of the earth itself,... lava? Briefly I am lost in a contemplation of the bowl and the fruit.

It is now quite noisy in the house. I feel pushed and shoved around in my own house. I want these people to leave. NOW!

A strange white-haired dog of a breed I have never seen gets into a cupboard. I tell someone to reach in there and get the dog out. Nobody hears me, they do not see me.

A busy young woman comes near and smiles. I say, There must be twenty of you here, who are you, what are you doing? She throws back her head, laughing, Twenty, she says loudly, there must be more like fifty of us, a hundred, and that is ‘net’, not counting children and cats and dogs and who knows what other creatures!

I am completely bewildered now, I feel overpowered by so many people, most of who do not see me, do not hear me. I am beginning to be frightened and I feel lost.

I know I am dreaming, but the dream does not let me go. It seems such a simple dream, but it holds me fast. I am inside the dream and at the same time I am thinking about what the dream ‘means’. What is this dream telling me? This is the night I planned to dream about moa, but this is not about moa... Or is it?

I feel as if I cannot feel, there are too many people, there is too much going on and I do not understand how this can happen in my own house — and at the same time the dream house seems familiar, and of course I do know what the dream means. This is what has happened all over the world in this century. Except now it is I whose house is invaded, who is invisible, ignored while the intruders take over my house, my life, my land.

Where am I? Of course I ‘understand’ the dream, but I am caught in it, the dream is my life and my life is this dream. Is that what moa is telling me? This is no dream. It is a nightmare.

I remember the little sprig of green under my pillow. Does that have such power that it can make a dream hold me this way? I am confused. I wake up all at once. It is a few minutes before 5am. I feel as if I have had this dream for five hours. I must get out of bed, I cannot stay in this dream. I must wake up. I must...

Soon the sun is up. My life shrugs itself into a more normal form. Outside it is calm, very beautiful. Plants and trees all around me radiate life, pulse with light. The outside temperature is 50° F.



Later. Last night's dream never quite left me, of course. I know that these intense dreams have a meaning beyond 'the story'. I have not tried to interpret, or re-interpret what the dream seemed to tell me earlier — I learned long ago to let go, let the dream float somewhere in the back of my awareness. If other meanings come up, so much the better, if not...

I think about how my feelings changed in the dream, from laughter, to frustration, to anger — it almost seems as if they are not my feelings! Why such feelings about strangers in 'my' house?

Since humans no longer think of the earth as their Mother, a place is just a location, real estate. The value of land is determined by things like its proximity to a good school, shopping malls, a golf course. Land is desirable if the weather is warm and pleasant, otherwise it is but a rest stop on our hurried way to somewhere else. A home is just a dwelling, interchangeable, a thing to be discarded when no longer needed, as we throw away the stuff we surround ourselves with.

But that is not how I felt in the dream... In the dream, the house was my home — 'my family is sleeping upstairs' — I was confused because there were so many people in 'my space'...

I realize that the dream could have been the story of Hawai'i as a Hawaiian would have experienced it, overwhelmed by people he first thought funny, but who turned out to be far from funny when they took over, re-arranged his 'house', brought confusion and pain. For a long time Hawaiians too were invisible to their 'guests'...

And even so I felt I had not understood all the dream had said. Again I put (another) sprig of moa under my pillow when I went to sleep. And again I had a vivid dream, this time a dream that gave me a clear answer to a problem one of my friends had asked help with. I woke up with a smile, feeling wonderful!

The next night I dreamt of warm-hearted people who reminded me of the joys of friendship, frivolity and fun. I woke up laughing. Several nights I dreamt of the exciting and pleasurable aspects of civilization, a sidewalk café in Paris, traveling on trains, islands in the South Pacific that were easily reached by planes that were not full and crowded!

Very gradually I realized that my feeling about moa was changing. It was no longer the awe-inspiring, alien, distant sphere of non-reflecting something I had seen before. Moa had become a comfortable and very supportive presence. My dreams have become clear and full of life and joy.

One morning I woke up with the sudden realization that what was happening in my relationship with moa was in some way comparable to the change of feeling I had had with redwoods. At first redwood trees had seemed so enormous, so massive, that I could not comprehend them, I could not relate to them. They were like mountains almost. I had felt an almost unapproachable distance separating us. Then, ten years ago, I had an opportunity to live for a few months in an old redwood forest, and there my feelings changed. Redwoods became familiar, they became a warm, protective presence, absorbing not only the moisture of the fogs (I learned that they absorb many gallons of moisture through their skin, not their roots) but absorbing also human pain and suffering — without being affected themselves by human concerns. Redwoods gave me calm support, peace of heart.

Redwood trees, and now moa, put things in perspective for me: my concerns, my worries, my insecurities and pain were like stage scenery, flat, without substance, leaving only my innermost 'me' filled with love. Moa helps me feel clear and simple...

I cannot say that I ever 'communicated' with the spirit of moa. How could I, with a spirit so ancient that it predates humans by many millions of years, and perhaps predates most plants and animals?

From the perspective of the spirit of moa my concerns for humans, for the earth, fade into insignificance. I must let go. Yes, humans are a violent species, and with civilization they seem to have become more so. Yes we have changed the face of the earth. Yes, tigers and many other species have disappeared — but who knows what other wonderful animals will take their place? What is a lifetime of less than a century to a species of plants that has been around for three hundred and fifty million years? (Some archeologists now dispute that number of years, but not that moa dates from before plants)

I no longer see that forbidding globe of light-absorbing space. The wrinkled face I see only rarely, but when I do, I understand why it has 'blind' eyes, I am invisible to it, even humankind is no more than a tear in a wrinkle of time. Whatever damage we might do to this planet will be balanced by the endless forces of the universe, 'now' does not exist in eternity, although it is all there is for us who stand on this earth now.

Moa to me is now a dear, warm presence, an almost invisible plant that clings to the side of tree ferns, and probably prefers warmer climes. It has survived so long, it will probably survive for another many millions of years. I marvel at the simplicity of this plant, totally without pretensions, without show. Just a stem that now and then splits into two stems. No roots, no flowers, no leaves. And now I recognize my attraction — my quest has always been for simple truths and simple people. I sense a common truth in moa and the aboriginal people I knew and loved —they too survived far longer than any of the empires that write our history.

The Meek shall inherit the earth.

A few months after I wrote this, having stopped to think I could communicate with this ancient little pre-plant, I walked past a dark corner where I knew moa grew. I smiled, and said (in my mind) Why are you growing here where it is not tropical... Almost instantly a thought came into my mind "the waters of the world are rising, we must adapt."



Another thing I am learning. I see that much of our human story is based on a perception that there is One Truth. From time to time a group of humans decides that what they know is The truth, and inevitably they clash with others who have their own 'only truth'. There are as many truths as stars in the heavens...



“Each space, each world, each order of beings possesses a Reality of its own because it produces effects in this special sphere and for this order of beings. We must beware of ideas and judgments based on our human mentality, on our human senses, and of relating and gauging according to our measure that which exists in the infinity of space.”

Alexandra David-Neel, *The Secret Oral Teachings of Tibet*

## #8

"Breathe in the pain of the world, and breathe out love."

TongLen, Tibetan Meditation

You may have seen publications of The World Future Society. The WFS is a group of eminent scientists that publishes what it calls 'forecasts', based on their study of 'trends'. The 'trends' they study are mostly published statistics like birth rates, economic indices, and occasionally trends observed in the media. For instance, the WFS forecasts that, "since there is no discernible change in birth rates anywhere in the world, populations will continue to increase." That forecast rests on the assumption that trends will continue unchanged. Unfortunately (and sometimes fortunately) things change.

The recent exercise promising Americans a balanced budget in 2002 is a similar forecast. I learned that calculations were largely based on economic statistics for one quarter (three months). The budget will balance in six years if this trend continues. Most of us know that it is unlikely that economic indicators will remain the same even for another quarter...

The World Future Society bases their forecasts on trends observed world-wide, for a period of time. I do not know how 'accurate' their forecasts are, but they are certainly based on trends observed over a longer period of time. Their current series of forecasts includes one that reads: A worldwide economic collapse is extremely likely in the next few years. Those unprepared may stand naked before a crisis unseen in the U.S. since the Civil War.

How does one 'prepare' for a worldwide economic collapse? They do not say.

If my job is dependent on the worldwide economy, I may lose my job. If my eating habits rely heavily on food imported from the far reaches of the earth, I may go hungry. If, on the other hand, I find most of the food I eat in my own garden or in my neighborhood, I will continue to eat well. People whose needs are simple, who have not forgotten how to dry clothes on a clothes line or darn socks, who do not need to fly to exotic vacation destinations to find nature and relaxation — simple people will have an easier time coping with a 'worldwide economic collapse' than sophisticated city types.

Personally, I think an 'adjustment' is inevitable. No, I am not an economist nor do I know the future. I strongly believe, however, that when we disturb a natural harmony, creation asserts itself. The economy of the world (our civilization), is unbalanced —as a cancer is an imbalance. The changes brought about by our civilization, driven as it is by technology and the greed of big business, seem to many of us out of control.

When a manufacturer who has employed a few thousand (or many thousands of) people closes a plant in order to move his business across the borders to a country where labor is paid a tenth of what we expect to be paid in this country, it is not only

unfair, but shortsighted. Employees who may have worked for this manufacturer for a life time suddenly and rudely awaken to the fact that their employer is more interested in his profit, and the profit of shareholders, than in the people who work for him. When government explains that this is really best for the country, we realize that government, too, is more interested in profits that can be taxed than the human beings they are supposed to serve.

Anyone who has occasion to seek medical help will soon discover that today's medical system is organized for profit, not for healing. A very large (and growing) part of the population can no longer afford medical insurance, or at best afford a cheap insurance that controls and limits which modern procedures they will approve. This medical system is for the rich, not for the rest of us.

We are told that we live in the Age of Information but the information we get thrown at us without pause is often patently untrue. Advertising is not designed to tell us what product is better, although that is what they claim. Advertising is the engine that drives of media, with a carefully timed morsels of entertainment and 'news' thrown in to make it more palatable, a diet that has made us so conditioned that we can no longer watch 'real' information that takes more than 6 minutes to present. We each must have our own list of things that do not work any more, or things that have been taken away from us because people who already have more, want even more than what they already have.

No wonder then that many people are searching for ways to find what is good, moral, ethical on their own. We look for simple values we had even a half century ago and that now seem to be evaporating.

These are not 'family values', but basic values like trust and honesty, civility, kindness. We want heart. We want our life to have meaning, we want some connection with Spirit, the divine, something that is ageless — and, sadly, we must find it on our own. Some people look to the future, or deep space — they expect friendly aliens to rescue us from ourselves.

More people look back in their own history. There is a resurgence of interest in Native American ways (values), in the values we imagine our grandparents had, in the values and rituals we imagine our religions had a few generations ago. Many people hark back to what they think Christianity was 'really' about. All over the world there are new and powerful 'fundamentalist' groups, going back to what each of them considers fundamental.

Hawaiians, who had their culture as well as their land stolen a hundred years ago, yearn to recover and relearn Hawaiian culture. They often rely on records that survive from the late nineteenth century. But written records of a hundred years ago describe Hawai'i as it was after the first hundred years of western occupation — they do not tell us of a pre-western Hawai'i.

Hawaiians had their own way of life for more than a thousand years. As in all pre-



literate societies, traditions were handed down from mother to daughter, father to son. 'Facts' were passed from generation to generation through chants and song: an oral history that transmitted accurate and reliable genealogies, for instance. But, as elsewhere, when people learn to read and write, they lose much of their capacity to remember — after all, words written on a piece of paper (or stored in a computer) are our memory today.

We now believe that only the written world is to be trusted. Not so. It is easier to manipulate the written word than oral traditions. Our own memories may be far more reliable than the accounts of journalists in reconstructing what was good and valuable in our past. I believe strongly that in all of us there is a memory of times past that does not depend on the written word.

We must relearn to trust our own innermost memories. In our search for more 'human' values we must look beyond written records, look farther back than a hundred years, we must look inside.

Psychologist/philosopher C.G Jung introduced the concept of the Collective Sub-conscious, a layer of memories that was somewhere in all of us, 'underneath' (although I do not mean to imply a location)

our ordinary memory where we 'remember' our own experiences. According to Jung the content of this 'collective' sub-conscious is in the form of archetypes, symbols and ideas that humans share across cultures. I believe, I know, that all of us have at least traces of such memories that go far beyond remembered personal experiences.

The thought expressed in the title of my book, 'hope lies in the ability to bring back to awareness what it is to be human' is to me a reality. I know that to be true.

I am certain that all of us, deep down (again, I do not mean to suggest a physical dimension) can 'remember' a time when humans knew that to survive we must cooperate, not compete. Contrary to what our present society tells us about human nature, we all know that we learn much more from praise and encouragement than from punishment. We all remember, on some level, that of course we humans can and do communicate non-verbally — we still do. We all know, although this civilization is trying hard to brainwash us to forget it. We are part of this wonderful world, not apart from it. Probably most of us still feel, deep inside, that the world is here to be shared, not to be exploited and destroyed for the profit of a few. If we are true to our innermost being we all remember that living is for love, for companionship, for joy — not for profit.

In looking for what we have almost lost we must look further back than a century or two, but most important, we must look beyond the form. We must look for the essence.

Some look far afield to find lost values. Many wonderful writers have written about fascinating and emotionally meaningful rituals and practices that can still occasionally be found in out of the way places all over the world. Sometimes the authors, or others,

then create workshops where they teach modern man to learn ‘the secrets of’ the Amazonian Indians, or the people of deepest Africa, or the ancient Mayans. For profit, of course. But profit for them, not for the people who told or showed them the ancient rituals. Living in a modern world that is heartless and devoid of spirit, we yearn for things tribal. But too often it is the form we learn, words, a ritual, songs — a form that was developed by a specific people who lived in a unique place at a certain time. Form, particularly if it is colorful and exotic, distracts from the essence that of course can be found inside.

Many of us have been intrigued with Japanese or Tibetan Buddhism, we have attended workshops where we learned a ritual of a South American shaman, we sing Celtic songs, burn candles for deities of the Indian sub-continent. We learned a form. New, exotic and colorful, but very hard to integrate into our contemporary lives because it remains foreign. We must look deeper, get beyond the words, the prayer, the incense, the posture of body or hands...

Only when we find the essence can we incorporate that in our life of today. The essence (the archetype, as Jung would say) is the same everywhere, although the form may differ. The divine, the magical, can be found in the customs and practices of all the peoples of the world, although his or her names are legion.

The fact that so much ethnic material has entered into what is almost the mainstream of today’s western civilization is a sign of our burning needs. But a hunger for meaning is not satisfied by putting on a costume of far away and long ago. What we need, I feel certain, is not yet another form, but the essence of living in tune with ‘the Spirit’. To me, it seems, that the spirit must be found within.

A hundred years ago the Hawaiians, as other peoples who wanted to fit into the then contemporary world, wore Victorian clothes, covering all of the body except hands and head — and preferably they covered the head as well. In Hawai’i today when dancers perform a ‘hula kahiko’ (‘ancient’ hula) the dance is superb, skillful and moving and probably quite authentic — but the female dancers are dressed in Victorian fashion: high collar, long sleeves, a loose skirt over bloomers that come below the knees; male dancers are dressed in long pants, white ruffled shirt with long sleeves, high collar. On other Polynesian islands traditional dances are usually danced in attire more appropriate to the climate and the place.

A little more than a week ago I had the privilege to be involved in a theatrical production here in our little village of Volcano. A very large cast of mostly amateurs, inspired by Auntie Nona Beamer, put on a show designed to demonstrate different kinds of Hawaiian chant and dance. It was funny and instructive, colorful and alive with energy — but the most amazing thing to me was how this motley group of people (ages 5 to 80+) in a very short time and only two rehearsals became a ‘whole’. There was never an unpleasant word. Throughout the rehearsals and the grueling schedule of shows (three shows the first day) there was a spirit of love and mutual support that

was truly miraculous. That, to me, was the Hawaiian spirit. Children, including very nineties teens in baggy pants, oversized t-shirts, and strange tribal hairdo's, learned in a few sessions different styles of Hawaiian chanting. They strode on stage, they had a 'presence', boys and girls who barely whispered the first time now belted out their chants. That was achieved with love, encouragement, praise and support — no threats, no punishment. That was truly the 'essence' of Hawaiian culture.

It does not matter that such essence may not be found in the records of a hundred years ago. It obviously lives in many of today's Hawaiians, however mixed they may be. That essence is inside people, deep in their hearts. I think it is in all hearts, not just Hawaiian hearts.

In this country we think (where did we ever get such an idea?) that laws and jails can change people's behavior... We expect human rights to be enforced by laws. We expect 'bad people' to go away if we lock them up and throw away the key. Not so. A better society can only come from the spirit, from the heart, from being open to what is good inside all of us. The crime rate reflects nothing so much as the rate of decay of our society. Laws and cops cannot cure the decay, only 'life' can.

We are flooded with books, tapes, CD's, workshops on how to learn this or that in a weekend, how to become a better lover, or live forever. But so much of that is learning a form, a new diet, a new way of worshiping, new words.

Form is a trap!

Yes, form has purpose. A painting looks better in a frame because the frame says: there is something worthwhile within this frame. And then there are frames that overwhelm what is shown. Words are necessary to convey thoughts when we do not convey thoughts directly (mind to mind); but we all know that words can be and are used for conveying falsehoods, and then the words, the form, become a trap.

Our skin is our boundary, our frame but skin says little about who we are. The stripes of a tiger are excellent camouflage and serve an important purpose, but stripes do not make a tiger. What I find in plants is not only beautiful flowers (flowers are just signals for bees and birds) or the beauty of leaves, or their healing properties, or even that I can eat some of them, but their essence. I often visit one of the many nearby lava fields, looking for the first plants to appear in a crack in the lava, usually insignificant, tiny spots of green that signal HERE IS LIFE!

The life force, or as Hawaiians say, Mana, is everywhere. It is in us, in plants, animals, in trees. I find it most awesome in the most difficult places, as in lava. Lava is rock, black and forbidding until it weathers and eventually, slowly, gives a toehold to some little plant, a lichen, a fern perhaps, until after a few more centuries it becomes soil. The form of the life force is not important, it takes its form from the environment, from the winds, the rain, the sun, from time itself. But in the end it is Mana that transforms raw lava.

Our civilization worships steel and concrete, it seeks to tame life itself. What we

crave, I think, is that Mana, the pure life force. Once we know what to look for, Mana can be found everywhere, in a blade of grass, an ant — even in death, which is also part of life.

I remember eating in a very expensive restaurant priding itself on ‘the presentation’ of the food they served. The plate looked like a small painting, the flavor was exquisite... but the amount of food, the nutritional value, was very slim indeed. I remember thinking I paid big bucks for an empty package. I see lawns that look like golf greens, flower beds that could be advertisements for seed catalogs. But even a moment’s observation shows that the plants are stressed to their limit with fertilizer and other chemicals and they almost certainly will not survive the winter. But, never mind, next year we buy a whole new garden.

Today’s men and women apparently feel the need to look like movie and TV personalities. Women are supposed to look gorgeous, they must be pencil slim (no illusion there when their skirt comes barely to the crotch). Westerners have thick heads of hair and perfect, glaringly white teeth. The package tells me they spend a lot of time and money on their looks, but it makes it almost impossible to read who is inside. In this society, at this time, it seems the package is all. We judge magazines by how many fancy graphics they have, we judge a book by how many copies are sold. People are judged by the color of their skin, when the only thing the color of one’s skin can tell me is where a foreparent came from. Augmented breasts do not make a woman beautiful; a hair implant and steroid-induced muscles do not make a man manly, straightened teeth do not make a smile...

What a waste of Mana!

I live in a rain forest. ‘Ohi’a trees are among the first to survive on lava and also among the first to arrive here who knows how... Where I live, there is some soil, they grow to be trees; on lava they stay stunted bushes for a hundred years. Many other plants that grow here were brought by people, some on purpose, others by accident.

Ecologists say that some of these newly arrived plants are a danger, they often displace the ‘native’ vegetation — I put native in quotes, because all plants on these islands are immigrants: some came tens of thousands of years ago managing to survive an almost endless ocean voyage on a floating piece of wood, or a coconut husk, others grew from seeds that were brought in birds, blown here by a storm. But in historical time an ever-increasing number of plants and animals were brought here by humans, first by Polynesians, now called

Hawaiians, more recently by people from everywhere. The State of Hawai’i has strict rules: plant material (and animals) cannot be brought in. We have laws and they are as strictly enforced as laws can be. And today, in our obsession with controlling nature we have scientific debates about which plants ‘belong’ here, which we will allow to stay and which we must eradicate.

Is not the more important question how humans can learn to survive on this earth?

There is in Hawai'i a growing movement to achieve some kind of 'sovereignty' for (some of) the people of these islands. That in turn has brought forth a discussion about who is 'Hawaiian'? When the Hawaiians first met Europeans they treated these strange visitors as guests. From the first there were no barriers to inter-marriage, with the result that today, after two hundred years, there are virtually no 'pure' Hawaiians left.

Almost all those who now lay claim to be Hawaiian have mixed ancestry. 'Race' was not much of an issue in these islands, even though, politically, they are now part of the United States. Now, with sovereignty as an issue that is to be resolved in a US Court, within the judicial framework of a western nation, it becomes necessary to define who is to be considered 'native'. Some say Hawaiians are people who have at least 1/32 'Hawaiian blood'. Others say a Hawaiian is a descendant of at least one Hawaiian alive at the time of the Monarchy, 100 years ago. And, of course, there are many other thoughts about who will be part of a sovereign Hawaiian nation...

I sympathize with the sovereignty movements. I believe it is only right that serious attempts be made to undo at least the legal aspects of the theft of 1893 when the Hawaiian monarchy was forcibly overthrown by a group of merchants and missionaries, using a company of US Marines—who they had no authority to command—to threaten and overthrow the constitutional government.

Yet the current arguments about who is native and who is not, remind me of the arguments of ecologists who try to determine which plants can stay (after we ourselves have brought them in) and which must go. Should we not learn some humility from past attempts to control the world. Perhaps even accept that we cannot control...?

How does one undo a great wrong. I think the only way is with love. We can apologize (as the present US Government has done), we can pay reparations perhaps. But how can we undo the destruction of a culture, the willful simplification of a language, the indoctrination of a free people with other people's values?

How do we restore the earth?

We can cherish, nurture, protect the Mana — but there is no turning back the clock. We must go from here, from what is.

The rainforest around me is as it is. Perhaps massive efforts and expense could eradicate a species of plants, but it is almost certain that tomorrow or the day after another plant—innocent and in its own environment harmless—will slip in under the eyes of the law and create change. Or, despite all our efforts to keep it out, the brown tree snake will sneak in and eradicate what few native species of birds survive, as it has in Guam. That too is Mana: change.

Laws passed thirty years ago in the United States have not changed racism in this country — although they may have changed, somewhat, the opportunities of some races to find advancement. An immensely expensive and brutally enforced War on

Drugs has not significantly altered people's behavior. A one time effort called The War on Poverty has not reduced poverty No, the trend continues to be that the rich get much richer and the poor very much poorer.

The (man-made) problems humans face on this earth are such, I believe, that they cannot be solved with laws, with force, with form. The only thing that will save us (and I mean that quite literally) is to find again the essence of who we are, and how we connect to the world and the spirit. For want of a better word, I call working from that essence, Love.

Our human essence is not to be found in history books, not in the written word—not even in the many Holy Books—and only with great difficulty may be found in the customs and traditions of other peoples. No, we must go inside.

My hope is that we go into the future naked. Naked but not empty! Because somewhere deep inside there is all we need to remember how to be fully human again. Starting from here and now, accepting what is, but leaving behind externals, empty rituals, prejudices, false assumptions about who we are and how we fit into this rich and complex planet. With only the strength of our Mana, and Love to make us work with Mana to become one with all creation again, one whole.



I don't take your words merely as words; far from it. I listen to what makes you talk--whatever that is--and me listen.

Shinkichi Takahashi



"Where does this difference between the past and the future come from? Why do we remember the past and not the future?..."

The laws of science do not distinguish between the past and the future."

Stephen Hawking *A Brief History of Time*



"One need not necessarily seek success in the world; avoiding mistakes in life is itself worthy of success..."

Huanchu Daoren *Reflections on the Tao*



"Statistics are like a bikini: what they reveal is suggestive but what they conceal is vital."

Anonymous (1986)

## #9

It has been raining hard here. Last month we had almost twice the usual June rainfall; other towns near here broke all records for June rain in this century. Fortunately, at this time of the year the rain is warm, so have been able to do lots of work in my garden — and 'lots of rain' does not mean no sun in between rain showers: all plants are green and lush and beautiful.

As it happened, also last month, I read a book called *The Deluge and the Ark*, by Dale Peterson. The deluge he talks about is not the forty days of rain of the Bible but a metaphoric deluge, a deluge of 'progress' that is destroying what is left of what I call the Wild. The book is focused on the demise of primates—monkeys and apes, our closest cousins—and primates are part of the whole so he also talks about plants and other animals, and mostly about we humans who are shaking up this whole planet. He spent two years doing research on primates, how they fit into the larger picture of life on earth, and what threatens their survival now. Then he traveled around the world to visit areas where the rarest of the primates might still be seen. Mr. Peterson alternates floods of facts and figures with his wonderfully colorful descriptions of apes and monkeys in their own worlds.

It is a beautiful book but not easy to read; it is not pleasant.

Now, a week or more after finishing my reading I am left with a memory of yet another account of man's headlong destruction of our earth and the biosphere. The facts are known and recorded in all the detail anyone could possibly want, and added to all the other books that are being written about the changes this world of ours is going through, it leaves me feeling sad for what we are losing, for what we have already lost. I like the Wild, it feels 'right' to me in its rich variety of plants and animals: I sense that there is where we belong. The world we ourselves are creating, Civilization, seems poverty-stricken and desolate in comparison despite the gadgets we invent and the frills of art we make.

Today the sun is back, trees and plants are radiant in their washed splendor, and as I look out over this little corner of the world I have very mixed feelings. I cherish the beauty and the peace of this place, I also see that changes are happening here, as everywhere else. There are some huge forces at work. I live a few miles from the main crater of Kilauea, active volcano on the island of Hawai'i, also called the Big Island. Kilauea is the home of the Lady Pele, Hawaiian goddess of volcanoes. To me and others who live here, her presence is very real. We feel the rumbles in the earth below our feet when the pool of molten lava in the earth underneath us shifts, sometimes we smell the odor of sulfur that is released with the gases that accompany the lava that has flowed out from the flanks of this mountain almost uninterruptedly for 14 years.

On this island the earth is being created, literally. When the lava pours into the sea new land is formed. This is creation at its most basic. It is a slow but steady process; of course, the earth was not created in a day. Lava as it comes out of the innards of the earth is bright, glowing red at 2000°F. Exposed to the air it soon cools and for a while flows like black mud. As it cools further the lava congeals the waves and ripples of the

flow into harsh rock.

It will be some years before anything will be able to grow on these uneven fields of black stone, then a tiny lichen will find a hole, some moisture from the air and microscopic crumbs of 'dirt'. After that maybe a fern will find a spot, and after more years, other plants. The plants attract insects, who in turn attract lizards. And so the cycle of Life rolls, slowly but surely.

Plant roots find little cracks in the lava, the pressure of their growth splits the crack further. In time, the action of roots, rain, wind and sunshine crumbles the lava rock, which, mixed with decomposing plant material makes fertile 'soil'. That takes years, centuries, of course.

If rain falls plentifully and often—and regularly—it may only be a hundred years before plants can begin to grow, and a few more hundreds of years for a 'mature' forest to be in place, a forest that has achieved stability by being sufficiently diverse. Forests makes more soil, the roots of trees prevent soil from washing away in rain and storms, while the leaves of the trees pump oxygen into the air while taking out carbon dioxide. A forest is a whole. It is the entirety of soil, roots, tree trunks that lift leaves up to reach for the light, rain, air, birds and animals, and wind and sunshine that makes a forest. And forests are but a part of the biosphere, the envelope of land and ocean, rock and water, air and growing plants and animals of all sizes around our earth.

When I think of the earth as an organism, forests might be the lungs and the heart, circulating and pumping life-giving energy into everything.

The million different forms Life assumes are a marvel, a miracle. But if we focus on the differences, we probably miss the point. All the many forms and shapes and colors and capacities that Life has taken are really only manifestations of the One. Life is one.

For instance, the human body has millions of cells that make one person. Yet all our cells came from one cell that split and split again and differentiated and differentiated some more, and eventually formed a very complex organism, with organs, bones, muscles, veins, a heart and a brain — all expressions from the one cell of which it grew. Maybe the entire world with all its different beings, plants, animals, tiny and huge, form a similar kind of organism where all beings are from the same source, the earth. They look different, but they are different only in form and function, not in essence. And all the manifestations that we call plants and microbes and humans and predators are totally dependent on each other. What makes the whole 'work', is that all the many forms together come from one and are one.

There is nothing mystical in that vision. It is the ancient way of understanding what is.

Each cell of the body, as each species and every individual of a species, has a bit of the Life force, which is balanced by the Life force of its neighbors. And when, occasionally, one kind of cell grows rampant without being checked by other cells, we call that a cancer; cancers kill.

In the planet-as-organism there are endless billions of cells, each with some portion of the Life force, each asserting itself, needing to reproduce itself. But each being always part of the whole, balanced by other beings, together making one whole.

As I mentioned in an earlier newsletter, I have been observing my 'lawn'. It is not really



a lawn any more because I have encouraged other plants to live with and among the grass. My garden is green, but a mixed green: some grass, many kinds of little ferns, mosses, some little green-leafed plants. In one corner I planted some Corsican mint more than a year ago. When I looked the other day, I thought this tiny and very fragrant little plant had disappeared, but I found it had spread here and there. There is no longer a little mat of Corsican mint, but the little leaves can be found in between the mosses and the grass.

I have made a new observation. The grass does not grow as fast any more. Perhaps it does not grow as fast because I do not mow the grass as often as before. It seems that if I do not mow the grass as often, the grass does not feel it has to hurry up and heal its wounds, it relaxes and gives mosses and other ground cover a chance to get a foothold. And of course I never use 'weed' killers, Why should I; what are weeds? And I never have to use fertilizer because this rich mix of grass and many other kinds of green is becoming a stable ecosystem.

When I look at the forest all around my little garden I see tall 'ohi'a trees and tree ferns, sticking up from a jungle of different climbing vines, many other plants and a certain kind of ginger. The ginger is very obvious. As all gingers Kahili ginger has stunning blooms, large bunches of brilliant yellow flowers with bright red stamens. Kahili ginger is a fairly new arrival here. It obviously likes this altitude and our weather, because at sea level this ginger behaves modestly, here it is very aggressive. It spreads, it takes over, it invades. I spend time and effort to keep it out of my little garden. That makes me feel guilty at times, but I know that if I let it in, it would soon take over. I am trying to be nice about it, but that is not always possible. One of the things I am experimenting with is planting a strip of another kind of ginger, red ginger, at the periphery of the garden because I think that the red ginger slows down the Kahili ginger's advance. We shall see...

Eventually, I know, a new balance will be achieved. Perhaps another plant will come in which will displace Kahili ginger. Or a disease might make the Kahili ginger less aggressive. But I should rephrase that sentence. If we would leave things alone, a new balance would be achieved. But, as we all know, that is not very likely. We, humans, do not leave things alone. We feel it is our fate to 'control' nature. It is also we, humans, who made the mistake in the first place. We brought in Kahili ginger, as we brought in other plants that we now realize have become a nuisance. Rather than admit our earlier mistake and promise never to meddle again, we talk eradicating Kahili ginger.

We also brought in other plants. Someone brought in a house plant from Brazil, tibuchina, with the most exquisite purple flowers, red buds, and thick green foliage. Whoever brought the house plant, he got tired of it, threw it away. Tibuchina took root and discovered that this climate was absolutely perfect, so that now all along most of our roads tibuchina dots the landscape with royal purple flowers set off by rust-red buds and dark green leaves. It is not a tree, nor is it a climber exactly, but because it grows so fast it reaches into trees up to ten or more feet high.

Similar kinds of changes are happening all over the world, often more dramatically than here. Sometimes the changes are a result of the importation of a new plant, or an

animal, or even a microorganism, more often these days the changes are the result of humans needing more land to grow food.

When forests are cleared in the tropics, many of the trees are 'hardwood', felled for export, giving a third world nation needed income. Explosively growing human populations create a need for more land to grow food. It is natural that expanding populations move into newly cleared forests. Unfortunately, as people are discovering everywhere, the wealth of tropical rain forests lies in the forest itself, not in the soil, so that when the trees are gone the soil might grow food for a year or two. After that the sun and the wind and the rain wash what soil there was away. Tropical rain forests are whole ecologies where the enormous variety of life forms and moist air, hot temperatures, rain are totally interdependent. It is not soil that grows plants, but the interdependence of many aspects, life forms, circumstances.

As every one else, of course, I knew that this was going on, but *The Deluge* and the *Ark* brought it home again in stark detail because the destruction of forests brings with it the extinction of many, many animal and plant species. In a few years there will be no more gorillas, orangutans, gibbons in the Wild. Many apes and monkeys we barely know will not even be 'preserved' in zoos. Thousands, perhaps millions of species of plants are disappearing daily before we have had a chance to know them, or know anything of the qualities they might have that would make medicines. All this is happening today. As this book makes clear, the changes are too great and are happening too fast for parks and 'reserves' to do much good. Nothing can stop this process. And it is happening not only to the remaining rain forests, but on all the islands of the Pacific as well.

In my little corner of the world I see, on the one hand creation, very slowly, measured in hundreds and thousands of years, and at the same time I see destruction that is measured in years. The rapid changes in the world are speeding up. In my own lifetime, three quarters of a century, the human population of the earth has increased probably three fold, from two billion to almost six. A small percentage of all humans now lives better than kings lived only a hundred years ago. By 'living better' I mean they live longer because they eat better, live more hygienically, and have better medical services. They also use many more machines and it is safe to say that half of the things we use were not even invented ten or twenty years ago.

The rest of the humans, those who do not live like kings, are struggling to assert their rights to space and food and health, their right to make offspring and the right to provide food and education for their children. And because there are so many of us, we demand the use of land that is now Wild, habitat for thousands and millions of species we scarcely know. It must be obvious who will 'win' this contest. But at what cost!

The Wild includes most of the rainforests of this earth, areas that probably play a crucial role in the maintenance of a livable ecosphere. There is reason to believe that rain forests act as regulators of our weather, and that their destruction affects many facets of the wonderfully complex layer of earth/ water/air in which Life exists. In fact, it probably would be accurate to say that Life is that complex layer of earth/water/air

that is the skin of our globe.

Scientific studies show clearly that further destruction of forests alleviates people's hunger for land and food only very temporarily and not very well. Studies are beginning to show that loss of forests very probably affects the biosphere on which we rely for Life itself. Yet the time for a choice seems to have gone by unnoticed. We chose long ago, perhaps when we first came on the scene. Of course extinction of plant and animals species occurs not only because of the destruction of forests. There are a thousand ways that we, humans are depleting the richness of the earth.

I must learn to see this world from the perspective of moa, that small almost invisible plant that has been around for millions of years, long before man, before plants even. If the earth is 3 billion years old, humans have been around for one or two hundred thousand years. At first there were very few of us, a few thousand who went from Africa to all corners of this planet. And then for thousands of years at most half a million spread all over the world. We were able to adapt to the most extreme climates and circumstances. We survived against enormous odds. We survived not only harsh climates, but predators, uncertain food sources, changes in the earth and its oceans, we survived at least one ice age, we survived shifts in where land was and where sea. And always we survived as nomads, moving with the season, moving to where food was. Always in very close communion with this earth, which we knew very intimately indeed — we had to, in order to survive!

Then, perhaps no more than ten thousand years ago, some of us thought to domesticate plants, and then animals. Instead of living within the ecology of the earth, we imagined we could make our own world. Then things began to change, at first slowly probably, then ever faster. We learned to control and breed plants and animals for our needs. We controlled the earth, rivers, mountains. And as we learned control, we learned to control each other and ultimately ourselves. Nobody knows the steps between nomads with a few tools and now. Maybe the steps are not important. This is where we are today, on the threshold of being the single dominant species on a planet which we are rapidly making over in our image.

Today scientists are learning — primitive man knew this all along — that Life creates diversity, and that the more complex the total ecology, the more stable it is.

As I learned from some so-called primitive people: when you cut a rain forest and you plant one thing (one kind of tree, for example), you can grow exactly one generation of that tree; after that the soil is dead. The tree has taken out what elements it needed from the soil, but there were no other plants to put anything back into the soil.

In our zeal to expand our own species we are eradicating most other species. We may create a world for humans, a few domesticated animals and a few hundred plants and that seems to me a very simple, and therefore an extremely unstable ecology.

For a long time I was 'stuck' at that point. Today it seems that whatever we do in the name of civilization reduces the complexity of nature and so the viability of our ecosystem. Can we stop ourselves, change our ways? Not likely. Most of us are too busy making a living to worry much about the impact humans have on our planet; 'making

a living' can mean making lots of money to afford the things we think we cannot do without. For 95% of the population of this earth that means growing or finding enough food to feed our babies. It does not matter very much what 'caused' the present state of affairs. In its most simple and ultimate form the answer to that can only be: it is the nature of (modern) man to adapt the world to his needs — rather than adapting to the world as it is.

The recent history of this island is very much like the recent history of many third world countries. In the early eighteen hundreds it took less than 50 years to eradicate the sandalwood forests of this island. Sandalwood fetched a good price in China, so we cut all sandalwood trees we could find. What did we think? That it would grow again? Sandalwood is a hardy shrub and it takes many years to grow, and it needs the shelter of other trees, and a certain richness of environment to grow in. I can only conclude we only thought instant profit, nothing more.

When sandalwood was gone, we looked around: what can we do next? Aha! We can grow sugar cane. We cut acres and acres of forests (with other valuable hardwoods, of course), and planted sugar cane. Sugar cane likes sun and rain, which we have in abundance. It also needs certain nutrients from the soil. As with all mono-culture, the soil will be depleted in one season. So we had to add chemicals. The chemicals provided the nutrients needed by the cane but some of course washed away into the ocean. That killed fish. We used another chemical. That killed other fish. Sugar cane was grown in many third world countries with a lower standard of living where they had no unions demanding a living wage for sugar cane workers. So, for many years the Federal government paid the sugar cane growers (big business) huge subsidies, so that they could pay workers a living wage and still make a profit in the world sugar market. Last year these Federal subsidies were canceled (for sugar cane, other farmers in this country continue to be heavily subsidized). All sugar cane operations stopped on this island. Now we have acres and acres of ex-sugar cane land and many unemployed workers. Nothing much grows on what we call sugar cane land. Government and big business are looking for other things to do with that land to satisfy important investors. Some of this land has already been planted in macadamia nut trees. Macnut trees do not need many chemicals, they also need very little care, it is not labor-intensive — which means it does not do much to alleviate the problems of unemployed workers. Of course other countries also began to grow macadamia trees. Now we have too many. But big business and government have bigger plans: grow eucalyptus trees to use as pulp wood (for paper and cardboard). Evidently we find it almost impossible to shift brains, to get away from thinking in terms of mono-culture.

The problem is not that we are not smart enough to know the consequences. We know very well. We have done studies, hundreds of studies. We know that acres of eucalyptus is just another disaster in the making.

No, the problem is that we can only think money, and short term return at that. Certainly we know that any kind of mono-culture degenerates and sooner or later destroys the land. We know that pesticides run into the ocean and kill fish. We even know that chemicals cause cancer in people. But it takes time for people to get cancer

— and our investors want income now. And a year from now? We shall deal with that next year.

Our efforts to 'control' nature have always been designed to simplify the Wild . It is easier to harvest an acre of cucumbers that grows in neat little rows, than cucumbers that grow between other plants. By growing nothing but cucumbers, then carefully weeding between the straight rows, we simplify the ecology. One of the consequences almost immediately is that bugs that eat cucumbers can multiply overnight, micro-organisms that carry cucumber diseases spread like locusts. But for some strange reason we never accepted that lesson, we could not imagine that we might be wrong. we invented ever more potent chemical fertilizers and pesticides. There is a limit to how much potent chemicals the land, and we ourselves, can tolerate. But even today we cannot accept that lesson.

We could have learned from ancient farmers, who farmed for a thousand years by adapting agriculture to nature — rather than attempt to control nature. But we are told we are so much better than our foreparents.. We cannot imagine learning from people who were so obviously poorer than we are, not civilized as we are. And so we destroyed large areas of the world with chemicals, and so also destroyed many age-old cultures. We ignored and ridiculed the wisdom and experience of native peoples everywhere, devalued them and their cultures. We, modern humans, gave the rest of the world one choice: either you join us, become like us or you die.

I strongly believe that we, humans, had qualities that we seem to have forgotten, or suppressed. We knew, long ago, that to survive we must cooperate, not compete with each other. Today we rely on machines. We measure and count and think science knows best. We don't trust experience. We learn from books rather than from plants and sunsets.

Perhaps what is happening now is that we are no longer who we really are, but who our culture tells us we are, or should be. Better than other beings. Special. Apart from the natural world which we imagine we control, we own.

When I consider these strands of a complex tapestry that is Life on this earth, and I think about the role we, humans, seem to be playing at this moment in time (a very brief flash in the time we have been around, which in turn is a very brief moment of the time earth has been around, which in turn is no more than the last micro-second of the life of the universe that we know) — when I think about all that, I cannot help but wonder how we got so arrogant to think we are in some way 'special'?

What makes us special? Western is based on the idea that we are special because we are intelligent. Yes, humans are smart because we could adapt to an astonishing variety of climates and circumstances, we established ourselves almost everywhere on earth. We are clever because we can make things that are extensions of our senses and our muscles. We can make machines that see farther than our eyes can. We make machines that hear what our ear cannot. We can yell around the world. And, yes, we can think about ourselves thinking.

But many, or most of the things we think make us special are just the same qualities other beings have. Thinking about ourselves thinking is probably just an extension of

awareness... We cannot smell as well as a dog, see as well as a cat, hear as well as an owl. We cannot see at night, as many creatures can. We cannot regrow a limb, as the lowly salamander can. We cannot change the color of our skin. Without machines we cannot fly as an eagle, nor can we stay under water for an hour as a whale can.

We are special only in our own eyes. Is not that arrogance?

Or, are we special because we have some mysterious something we call a soul? We are spiritual beings, we say. The very oldest human writings speak of gods and beings who saw to it that the balances of nature remained intact. Humans can dream, although it certainly seems as if dogs do. We can imagine stories, situations, faces, colors, places — and we can even imagine that we are the only ones who can imagine.

Today we pride ourselves that we can imagine ourselves. Some of us imagine ourselves gods, others heroes, or macho villains, or coy maidens. All of that certainly has enriched our inner life, but what good does it do us, if we destroy the only home we have?

This is a mystery to me. I find it very difficult to think of anything human that is not part of the earth that has grown us. All the qualities we have (and some we have suppressed) must be qualities that are inherent in the very essence of this globe, this solar system, this universe. If we have awareness, then awareness must be part of what is. I know that some of us, perhaps, see a little ahead in time — then seeing ahead must be part of what is. It is not something 'special'. Can there be any quality or talent that is so special that it absolves us from being part of what is?

What if... what if we are just part of this world, with abilities and talents, individual and collective, that are no more and no less than abilities and talents of all the other creatures? The laws that apply to ecologies, apply to us just as well, as the law of gravity applies to us, or the laws of cause and effect, or the laws of time.

What if we are not special at all?

What if our only specialness lies in the fact that we have somewhat more awareness than a tiger so that it is our responsibility to look out for tiger's well-being?

The 'Ark' in the title of Dale Peterson's book refers to a few wild life preserves that provide scant protection for the shrinking number of species of wild animals now and certainly in the future, and cannot save the millions of plants that are disappearing before we have had a chance to know what qualities they might have we could 'use'. A more modern aspect of Peterson's 'ark' lies in those zoos that breed captive wild animals in the hope that, as the author says, at least his children and possibly even his grandchildren may be able to see what a gibbon looks like, or a rhinoceros. I suspect that my children and grand children will learn more from the movies we are so good at making today than from looking at an animal in a cleverly constructed jail. I cannot help but feel that sentencing gorillas to live in fancy prisons is but another kind of death sentence.

Reading Dale Peterson's book made me think of the story of Noah. The moral of that story is, I thought, that people had messed up, so God said, you will all be destroyed, and only a few of you (Noah's sons and presumably some women) and two of every

animal (God did not worry about plants?) were to be carried in an ark. After the flood the bad people presumably had drowned, and humans started over again.

We did not do so well this second time, did we? According to Dale Peterson, we need an ark again. The author does not mention who chooses who shall be 'saved'... Is it possible to save some animals in zoos, or save their cells in deep freeze, so that after—however long it might take to get back to a habitable earth—we can open the doors and let loose zoo-bred wild animals? Or 'create' new dinosaurs again from carefully preserved cells, as in Jurassic Park?

Many people, certainly in America, think that maybe we, ordinary people, are not so smart, but 'our scientists' can do anything they set their minds to. Not to worry, most people think, it seems, someone will figure out how to create a better world where 10 or 15 billion people can live in luxury.

And if in our haste to get there—wherever 'there' is—we destroy a few forests, and with it some plants and animals, not to worry, our scientists will recreate them, or surely someone will save 'the important plants' in laboratories and museums. Unfortunately we have no idea what plants are important!

No need to worry, other people say, all we can do is change ourselves, and to change ourselves all we need is to feel good. At all costs we must be 'positive'. I cannot help but think, Yes, just as before World War II. Then it was '*I will do better and better every day*', today it is '*don't worry, be happy*'. Certainly, it is more comfortable to be asleep. Rather than exploiters should we not be caretakers of this good earth?

Anything is possible, they say, it is never too late. If we all set our minds to it, we can change things. Really? Can we?

I do not know what a world without Wild will be like. I do not want to know. To me the Wild is almost like the original Chaos, the soup from which all creation evolved. Without the Wild, what is left will be pure Disney. We, at the end of this century, are witness to a titanic struggle between Civilization and the Wild. From what I have heard and seen, it seems that Civilization is winning. Probably because most of us chose Civilization. Why did we turn our backs to the Wild? Are we afraid of the dark? Or have we lost faith in what is and must desperately cling to imagined control?



As you may have guessed by now, I have a special feeling for Tiger. Not the species, the animal in a zoo, certainly not in a circus. No, Tiger-in-the-Wild. Tiger, to me, has become a symbol of a world where humans are inhabitants, participants, never masters. I was very fortunate to grow up at a time and in a place where tigers still lived in the wild. I met tigers in the wild. I knew people who raised a tiger pup, an orphan; they knew enough not to cuddle the pup, and when it was old enough they let it go.

Tiger to me means the unpredictable, magical, powerful Wild. I was also fortunate to be raised without having fantasies about tigers. I knew they could easily kill me — certainly when I was a young boy — but I never feared: tigers very rarely kill people. I was in awe of Tiger, who is not like other cats. Tigers like water. tigers are loners, they

move so stealthily that some say they can be 'invisible'. Tigers are very powerful. And somehow I feel familiar with the 'essence' of tiger. My very first memory, I think, was from when I was maybe two years old. My parents took me to the zoo in Amsterdam, where at that time, lions (I do not know whether they had tigers then) were kept in

the 'Lion House', a dreadful concrete box, where a lion had a cage, concrete on all sides, heavy iron bars on the side where people walked by. I can still smell it that stuffy lion smell. The memory is very sketchy, as a two year-old I knew few words and fewer concepts. All I remember is seeing this large yellow animal, on a triangular platform in one of the corners of the cage, six feet off the floor. The animal made a noise, and, according to my mother, I said "leeuw moet overgeven", which translates something like 'lion is about to vomit'. As far as I know the lioness did not vomit, but my memory is a feeling of great concern for a wild animal confined to a concrete box...

I was nine or ten when first I saw a tiger in the Wild. Even before that time I remember having dreams about tigers. I liked to listen to stories about tigers, and for much of my childhood tigers were important to me and for some strange reason Tiger was always comfortable, familiar.

Native Americans might say that Tiger is my totem animal. To the aborigines in Malaysia, Tiger was 'my animal'. As some of you know, I have pictures of tigers all over my house, in my computer, in my car. I think of Tiger as a companion, as my connection to the Wild. At times Tiger has been my protector.

Some years ago I visited my friend S., who lives in a wonderful forest in Eastern Washington State, perhaps the closest I have come to experience the Wild in America. S. and her husband have been living very lightly on their land, mostly in tents, without power. S. has a talent for building imaginative, semi-temporary structures from thin sticks, bound tightly together.

All day we had talked about what she was doing on the land, the animals she had and was going to have. Toward evening we talked about some of the more unusual animals who had visited there. Elk, of course, and a bear had been visiting a few times. After dinner we talked more, and it was quite dark when she escorted me to the little 'guest house' where I was to stay the night. Before she left me she pointed in the direction of where I knew her Medicine Circle was and said, Oh, if you see a white elk in that direction, do not be lured by him — he is a spirit elk! I smiled as I made myself comfortable in the bed which took up most of the space in the tiny cabin. I listened to the quiet night sounds, most of which I did not know in that part of the world. Just when I was about to drift off to sleep I heard sounds that I knew must be coyotes singing, although I had never heard them before. First one, answered by another quite far away, then a third from yet another direction, then two together, perhaps three. I was enthralled by the harmonies. The coyotes seemed to be on three sides around me, far away I thought. They obviously sang with each other, they were in touch with each other by song. One would sing a line, another would answer, then another would come in with another melody, two or three would join voices. It was astonishing and I wondered how long they would go on. Then I became aware of another sound, much closer. It sounded like careful footsteps, just on the other side of the very thin walls of the little cabin (I could see through them in many places, but it was dark outside). I turned my attention to the footsteps, the coyote concert now in the background. I



thought about the bear we had talked about, remembered stories of bears. I did not think I had any food in the little house, but I knew that this structure would not deter a determined bear.

Almost without thinking I asked Tiger to protect me — what that means is, I thought of Tiger (and by now he is a real ‘presence’ to me) and asked him to go outside: I imagined him lying in front of the door of the cabin. Instantaneously, as if a switch had been thrown, all coyotes stopped singing and the footsteps I had heard ran away with great crashing noises, obviously in great haste. I slept well.

The next morning S. asked me whether I had heard the elk, he had walked around for some time. Then she added, ‘suddenly he took off like a bat out of hell — wonder what scared him?’

I feel very blessed to have consciously experienced what the Wild used to be. The Wild is gone — not quite yet, but almost. To me that seems an incredible, almost unbelievable loss. The Wild put us humans in the larger context of this planet; it gave us perspective, put us in our place. We killed it; how can we live without it?

Of course there is a more important reason why I fear for the near future of a world without Wild. Such an impoverishment of the world ecology does not only endanger humans, but all Life on this planet.

People ask me, Why do you worry? You are just one person, you cannot do anything about it anyway, can you? No, I cannot. And I do not know why I ‘worry’. It is not really worry. I rebel, I resent, I try to understand how it is that we have so completely turned our backs on nature. We love sunsets and lawns that look like greens, and we breed bigger roses and enormous tomatoes, but how can my fellow humans think that anything they make is better than the world we were born of? How can we think that we can improve on something as awe inspiring as creation?

This afternoon the sun shines and my garden sparkles and glows. It is peaceful here. Birds are scurrying here and there, feeding and shitting seeds — that is what birds do in the great scheme of things. Black skinks wiggle their hips in my ‘lawn’. Spiders make elaborate webs that wave in the slightest breeze. I noticed that moa now grows everywhere in my garden.



Had a dream last night. Each time the last member of a species died a bell rang. When the last plant of a species died there was a thin sound, a sort of tinkle. Each species had its own unique sound that sounded one last time. When the last wild gorilla dies there will be the deep dark sound of a very large gong. In my dream tinkling bells and trills of many different tones and whistles and great bells and gongs were going off faster and faster until the din woke me up.

And when the last tiger dies, I too must die.

## #10

I have had several comments on the last newsletter. They range from "Yes, of course, we all knew that, but it probably bears repeating...", to "I do not want to know, my mind cannot grasp it...".

I would be very surprised if 'we all knew that'.

I am not surprised but sad that some people do not want to face what we are doing.



As so often happens, when we are engaged with a certain subject, every magazine we open has something that touches on that subject (that is called 'synchronicity', *two events that must be random in*

*our western world view, yet, when happening close in time seem to give a relevance to each other*).

In the last newsletter I mentioned, rather casually, that I think all beings have awareness, all cells have awareness. I did not elaborate. The day after the newsletter went out, a magazine came that dealt with the same subject.

In the early 70's, when I was teaching at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa, I often started the semester with some 'educational' films. One of those I remember vividly; unfortunately I cannot remember its name. I vaguely remember that it was made by someone in Berkeley (I think her name was Thelma Moss?). The film was a dramatization of research that was going on (20 years ago) in the general area of consciousness, awareness.

The part of the film that made the strongest impression on me and my students dealt with experiments that someone was doing with a polygraph (a 'lie detector', so-called) attached to plants and other living things. A polygraph measures tiny electrical currents that apparently are everywhere. Used as a 'lie detector' it is hooked up to a person. If your skin is normally dry, there is a certain amount of resistance. If you break out in a sudden sweat, the resistance is almost immediately reduced. The theory is that one can lie with words, but that your body will give you away. When someone knowingly lies (and supposedly therefore feels a certain anxiety) one's palms get damp and there are other effects that are largely uncontrolled by our will.

In the movie I remember a polygraph was not used to measure lies but just 'activity'. Two electrodes were attached to a plant leaf, for instance. The polygraph then registered 'something' going on. The polygraph screen shows a line with little wiggles (like the heart monitor we have become accustomed to seeing on TV shows of medical emergencies — and very much like the lines on the machines that register earth 'activity'). The 'activity' of a plant at rest is a tiny wiggle in a line that marches on with time. A strong reaction makes the wiggle bigger. Very much as in the machines that measure the earth's activity underneath our feet here, a mile or so from the crater of an active volcano, where the wiggle zaps back and forth to measure an earth quake.

The machine does not tell us what the activity of a leaf means, of course. When we see increased wiggles on the machine hooked up to a leaf, it does not mean 'fear' or 'joy'; it simply means 'activity'. The only thing we can say with some confidence is that the machine definitely shows that the plant is reacting!

In one of the experiments, the electrodes were placed in two small containers of yoghurt ('live' yoghurt, the kind that has live organisms, from which you can make more yoghurt). The movie first showed one small carton of a well-known brand of yoghurt, which was divided into two portions. A few spoonfuls were put in another container, the rest remained in the original carton (but both contained the same yoghurt).

Each of the containers had electrodes put in, leading to a polygraph. One container was put in a 'galvanic cage', a box of metal mesh, known not to allow electromagnetic energy to penetrate (so the caged yoghurt could not pick up measurable signals from outside). The free yoghurt was taken into a room 50 feet away. The movie showed how both yoghurts showed electrical activity: the line on the machines showed gentle fluctuations, waves.

Now the experiment. Someone puts one drop of milk from an eye dropper into the free yoghurt, Milk is food for live yoghurt. At the exact instant that the milk dropped into the free yoghurt the caged yoghurt in its galvanic cage showed great 'excitement', the wave on its machine got wilder.

Of course we do not know what the waves 'mean', but obviously 'something happens' to the caged yoghurt at the exact moment that the free yoghurt (once part of the same yoghurt) is fed. Somehow, the caged yoghurt is 'aware' (and not through electromagnetic waves, because the cage does not allow those to penetrate).

The visual impact of seeing the drop of milk fall into one yoghurt container causing the other yoghurt to react violently was quite stunning. The movie showed other experiments, plants reacting to music, to loud noises— but the yoghurt experiment made quite an impression on all of us who saw the movie.

The university had many foreign students then and I noticed a difference between American students and people from the Pacific and Asia. The School of Public Health was a graduate school; many, particularly from other countries, were 'mid career', doctors and nurses, who had experience on their profession. Most of the American students had Bachelors degrees in other subjects. The people from the islands and from Southeast Asia smiled and nodded. Yes, they could accept this without difficulties. I'm certain that they were wonderful doctors and nurses but living in other than western cultures they lived in a different reality where our super materialistic culture had not overwhelmed other views. The American students on the other hand preferred to ignore what meaning the experiments might have, or could not accept that this was really science.

NOTE, added June 2011 today I came across a brief article by Michio Kako, a famous physicist who is often giving understandable speeches, and writes understandably about modern physics. The article is about the one theory of physics that "works", that, in fact, most modern inventions are based on, Quantum Mechanics (Einstein and many others). The theory has many aspects that even physicists can barely or not at all accept. It has mysteries. For instance, and I quote: "Some of what quantum theory predicts and states is almost like something

out of science fiction. Matter can essentially be in an infinite number of places at any given time; it is possible that there are many worlds or a multiverse; things disappear and reappear somewhere else; you cannot simultaneously know the exact position and momentum of an object; and even quantum entanglement (Einstein referred to it as spooky action at a distance) where it's possible for two quantum particles to link together effectively making them part of the same entity or entangled. *Even if these particles are separated, a change in one is ultimately and instantly reflected in it's counterpart.* At the end of the day, the world of entanglement caused physicists like Einstein to both dislike the predictions and feel nothing more as if their were serious errors in the calculations." (my emphasis)

Then, a few weeks ago I received the July issue of a magazine called The Sun, 'A Magazine of Ideas'. In it I found a long and wonderful piece, "The Plants Respond," an Interview with Cleve Backster, the original inventor of the polygraph, the same man of the yoghurt experiment of many years ago. Thankfully, Mr. Backster did not stop doing experiments; he is still at it, and his results are even more astonishing than I had thought possible. He has hooked up plants, eggs, and human cell samples to his polygraphs, and they all react — but not only to physical stimuli, like yoghurt being 'fed' a drop of milk, but it seems quite evident from what I read in this interview that 'all living things' react to (human) emotions and thoughts...

Those are my words, not the words used in the very cautiously and scientifically worded article. By 'thought' I mean that plants, for instance, react to a thought in the experimenter's head. When the experimenter thinks about burning a leaf (he had not 'done' anything yet, just let the thought come into his mind) the leaf showed a reaction.

Inevitably a large portion of the interview was devoted to the question why western science has not taken notice of these experiments. The idea of any living being other than a human having 'awareness' conflicts with all the theories natural scientists have made about how the world is. Western science is based on the fixed idea that everything in the universe is matter, there is nothing but 'objects' that can be objectively measured. In such a world view, of course, 'awareness' or consciousness cannot be measured (in fact, a measurement can never prove the existence of something, it can only show more or less of something we accept as 'real'). One of the important principles discovered in the most modern science is that there is no such thing as an 'objective observer' because the observer and the observed interact.

#### **What I look at looks at me.**

Psychiatrists usually define consciousness as being aware of 'reality': what time is it, what is today's date, who is president? If you know the answers to those kind of questions you are in touch with reality, and therefore conscious. I think reality, or awareness (of reality) is something entirely different.

Measuring emotions is very tricky, so what we can measure is only the effect of an emotion on something else — how sweaty our palms get when we get stressed, how red in the face we get when we tell a lie. But everyone knows that with some basic biofeedback training it is not difficult to control those effects. That is why today polygraph evidence is usually not allowed in court. Politicians learn to lie with a smile that is no different from a real smile.

Isn't it obvious, though, that it is one thing to show that when you take a burning match to a plant leaf, there is a strong reaction; it is something else altogether when you show that the plant leaf (hooked up to a polygraph) also reacts to a thought, an intent to burn the leaf.

The idea that a plant leaf could be aware of what I am intending to do is too outrageous for scientists, so they ignore, ridicule, brush off these experiments as ‘anecdotal evidence’. That means such evidence cannot be replicated, it is a unique, a one-time finding. Actually all the mentioned experiments have been repeated repeatedly.

Probably the real difficulty is that this observable (repeatable!) finding conflicts with too many established scientific theories.

It seems a waste of time to try to convince western scientists. A science that limits what facts they are willing to accept to only those facts that fit into their theories is not a science.

My thinking is from another perspective. If someone demonstrates to me that yoghurt in a galvanic cage reacts to what happens to its sister yoghurt (from the same culture, far away) I accept that yoghurt has some kind of ‘awareness’. I am also convinced that plants have awareness. Animals certainly have awareness (whoever has been around animals cannot possibly deny that).

I think it is reasonable to assume that all living cells have awareness. From a growing body of information it appears that this awareness is not related to what we call our senses, the plant leaf that reacts to a thought does not see, or hear or feel such information, so there must be another way that cells and beings made up of cells communicate with each other.

In my own experience I have accumulated more than enough evidence (all ‘anecdotal’ of course, I am proud to admit) to accept that animals and plants can communicate with me, if I am sensitive to that kind of communication. But, more important than my sensitivity is that I accept that such communication is possible.

As long as we refuse to accept that strangers are like us, we can say such stupidities as: “they all look the same to me.” In studying a new subject, the first thing we must do is to accept that there is something there. Only then can we see nuances, colors and textures. Only then can we begin to perceive faces, gestures, sounds that might even be language if we only knew the words.

When I spent time with the aborigines in Malaysia I would wonder why they did not chatter as we did. As a group of us would sit around in the afternoon, or early evening, there was a calm back and forth of questions and answers, stories, comments — but I cannot remember that there was ever the kind of general noise that we are used to when we sit together. I cannot remember ever hearing two people speak at the same time. That says something.

In the end I had to accept that obviously the aborigines were in some sort of constant communication with each other, but it was not through the spoken word. In fact, that kind of communing is not in words at all.

And now, words fail me to express how one can commune without words. We need to look into that, but of course western science cannot possibly do that, because it is ‘impossible’ we are told.

The amazing thing was, that once I accepted that maybe there was this other kind of communing, I also ‘heard’ it. No, not with my ears, I cannot even say where or how, but with another as yet unnamed sense.

The experience of suddenly ‘hearing’ was very similar to another experience I had many years before. Once, on a sailing trip with three other young men, all Danish (although they could all

spoke English well). The first week was miserable because I did not understand a word, not even a syllable, when they were talking among themselves in Danish. I remember at night hearing an unbroken stream of sounds that was utterly meaningless to me playing in my mind. I felt indignant. I could not even separate individual words from the stream of sound. I rejected these sounds, I was in denial. Until as we were coming into a harbor, and the captain gave a series of rapid commands (in Danish, of course) which again left me out, I got mad. When we were safely anchored, and they all joined me in the cabin, I vented my wrath. I scolded, yelled, obviously very emotional. For some reason, that broke a barrier in me and, miraculously, from that moment I began to pick up words, expressions. A few days later I was able to shop for the crew when we landed on another island at a small village (I remember I asked for tomatoes, one of the most difficult words to pronounce in Danish, I thought). After that experience I never blocked my mind to foreign languages again. I traveled all over the world for many years and everywhere I found it easy to pick up words like Hello, Goodbye, Thank you, often phrases.

In the same way, once I accepted that the aborigines somehow (on another level, in another dimension?) communicated without words, I could begin to tune in to it.

Let me hasten to add that tuning into this level of being together is only possible in isolated jungle environments, where it has survival value. Our twentieth century world is too noisy, too loud, too brash to allow this deeper kind of communing. If one were to open himself up at a cocktail party, for instance, the internal noise would be more hurtful than the external noise, and equally meaningless. But that is the reason I cannot be in a large store more than a few minutes. The overwhelming quantity of 'things' confuses me, but the half-heard thoughts of hundreds of people is worse.

I think there are two reasons why we have lost the ability to be aware of other beings, including animals and plants. One is that the world we have created for ourselves is so loud and intrusive and mechanical that it drowns out whatever subtler awareness we might have of other beings. The other reason, of course, is that we collectively assume that it is impossible. In addition we also assume that all non-human beings have no awareness.

Today, in order to be 'aware' it is necessary to make a conscious effort to go into a meditative state, or whatever one calls this 'alternative' consciousness where we can commune with plants and animals. It is no longer our natural way of being, but something we have to re-learn.

There are many different ways to meditate. Perhaps we each have to find our own way that works for us. For me, I think of it as 'getting out of the way'.

Even though my life is very simple compared to the life of others, I still spend time thinking about how to keep my car running, I have to keep my computer and all the machinery in my house running, I must think about how to relate to other people, I write this newsletter and other things, which means I have to worry about spelling, sentence structure. I keep my house clean, sometimes I listen to news—all activities that require being in what I call western time and space. The mail goes out at 12:30 here, so that if I have bills to pay I must be aware of time. I must be aware of the weather, what it is and what it might be later this afternoon, because it determines whether I can put laundry on the line outside.

We live by calendars and clocks, we live with money, we live with television and telephones, we live in a man-made world. Getting out of the prison of our world is a great effort. I have to

consciously turn off my thinking, my worrying, my awareness of clock time.

But, and that is encouraging, it can be done.

After many years it has become second nature for me to 'get out of the way', I can do it almost instantaneously. When I step out of the way it is natural to commune with plants, I 'talk with them' (and they answer). And when I get out of the way I know things that I cannot possibly know.

A few weeks ago I was getting ready to go to town. I usually go once a week, to do necessary shopping and to see friends and family. Almost always I go in the early morning; I am a morning person. That day I had put my town clothes on, had put mail to be mailed and magazines to be recycled in the car. I had a shopping list, had put the empty water bottles in the car to be re-filled. I had my town hat on, car keys in my hand. I walked out the door, about to close the door behind me and turned right around.

I stood inside the door for a minute. Did I forget something? No, I had everything.

Many years ago I learned not to question these sudden messages, but I was curious. Why should I not go to town today, this morning?

I sat down, my hat still on my head. The phone rang. Someone I did not know called from the mainland. He had read my book. Can we talk, he asked. Yes, of course. We talked for perhaps half an hour. Less than an hour later, when I finally had put my hat away and realized I was not going anywhere that day, I smiled, and thought there was a phone call, that is why I could not go.

The phone rang again. Another person I had never met called. She too wanted to talk. A third call came that afternoon. All three were from people who had read my book (or heard about the book) and somehow felt moved to contact me in person.

In the past three years many people have written, but this was the first time that people called me and not one person, but three in one day.

Allowing that sort of 'synchronicity' in my life as a natural occurrence has made my life richer. By listening to that inner voice that turns me around as I am about to shut the door, makes my life full of exciting miracles. I cannot escape the notion that something in me, in another dimension (whatever that means) 'knew' I should stay home that Monday.

Today I accept that. This is the way the world is. I accept that plants can sense my intentions, perhaps even before I know them myself. Of course dogs 'know' that I approach them without fear, I expect them to be as friendly as I feel.

It is that feeling in touch with living beings around me that makes me have such a strong sense of belonging. Feeling one with All That Is becomes a warm reality when feeling close, even intimately in touch with plants and animals.



Last month, August, was not a very good time for me. I went through a black cloud that damped my spirit, aggravated my aches and pains, and generally made getting out of the way difficult. I discovered that physical discomfort—which, after all, is the body's cry for attention—makes getting out of the way difficult. When the body demands attention it is hard to find my way to the other world, the world of being one with the plants and animals around me.

The black cloud also disturbed my sleep and I could only sleep in short snatches of an hour or two, with long periods of being awake in between. I did not dream. That really upset me. My dreams have become so important to me, they are quite literally part of my life. The day is not the same if I have no dreams to work on.

All one can do in a black cloud is struggle through it. Will power does not make it go away, one cannot deny the reality of these periods of darkness. But, I found, it is essential to hold on to what I know. I cannot lose faith, even in times when What Is, is almost out of reach. I must trust that sooner or later I can step aside again, and be in the world as it was before we covered everything over with concrete, calendars and clocks, schedules and science.

Now, finally, things are back to normal. I sleep well. I have dreams again (and such dreams!). I am back in the world of plants and animals, the closest I can come to The Wild.



*"Power is not manifested in the human being. True power is in the Creator. If we continue to ignore the message by which we exist and we continue to destroy the source of our lives, then our children will suffer... I must warn you that the Creator made us all equal with one another. And not only human beings, but all life is equal. The equality of our life is what you must understand and the principles by which you must continue on behalf of the future of this world. Economics and technology may assist you, but they will also destroy you if you do not use the principles of equality. Profit and loss will mean nothing to your future generations..."*

*"I do not see a delegation of the four-footed. I see no seat for the eagles. We forget and we consider ourselves superior, but we are after all a mere part of the Creation. And we must continue to understand where we are. And we must stand between the mountain and the ant, somewhere and there only, as part and parcel of Creation. It is our responsibility, wince we have been given the minds to take care of these things. The elements and the animals and the birds, they live in a state of grace. They are absolute, they can do no wrong. It is only we, the two-leggeds, that can do this. And when we do this to our brothers, to our own brothers, then we do the worst in the eyes of the Creator."*

Oren Lyons, in an address given to the United Nations, 1977

5 September 1997



## #11

The other day I heard from a friend reminding me that it is now Fall, the foreword to Winter when much of the northern world is sort of on hold, locked in snow and ice... It made me realize how blessed I am to live here where the seasons are minor variations on a theme of lushness, where plants and animals never sleep for some months each Winter. Here in Volcano September and October are the sunniest months, with maybe some rain at night, but bright and wonderfully cool days.

Our seasons are marked by what blooms. The other day I discovered the first orchid bud, in a few weeks there will be the first spray of cymbidiums; I think this one is the brownish variety. And in Winter the camellias will be in full bloom. They are not much bound by season, they seem to flower all year, but in winter they bloom more.

I have lived where winters were cold, dark and dreary times. Real cold can be bracing, exhilarating even. But the slushy cold of Northwest Winters, or the dreary grey of Dutch Winters stay in my memory only as times of being on hold.

Many years ago anthropologists had a theory that the white race was inventive and creative because they lived where life was harsh, where people had had to learn to plan to survive winters. The thought was that having to think about times to come, that learning to figure out how to preserve food, that inventing many different ways to stay warm — all those challenges had led to our leadership in technology, to our ability to study and concentrate (home-bound in long, dark winters)...

For instance, these anthropologists said, look at the people who live in tropical regions, they do not need many clothes, food is abundant all the time all around them, they do not need to look ahead, they can sit on the beach and do nothing. That was probably also where the idea that non-white peoples were lazy came from.

Fortunately anthropologists no longer make such foolish theories, and in the last fifty years humans have visited everywhere, have met remnants from a thousand different cultures. It must be obvious to aware people that humans, however diverse they seem on the surface, are more alike than different. In fact, it seems, that 'adaptability' is one of the qualities that characterizes humans. People who grew up in a culture without a wheel (as for instance the first people of what is now Papua-New Guinea) can learn to drive a tractor or a bulldozer in a few days. There are parts of the world that fifty years ago were considered poor and backward, that today are thriving modern industrialized nations, with modern governments, all the amenities of life, rapidly increasing prosperity, where people make lots of money in our fast-paced global economy. It is not Winters that make people aggressive, capable of learning new skills in a hurry, learning how to compete, how to market, how to demand more of everything today — it is the seemingly almost infinite ability to adapt.

When humans first found themselves in lands that were cold and bleak, they did not grow more fur—as an animal would have to do—but they killed an animal, and used its fur to stay warm. Humans must have discovered the very first winter how to build a shelter that would keep them warm enough to survive the winter. Even our physiology is adaptable, we can change our diet practically overnight: when there are no grains, we can survive on meat, when there is no meat we can survive on roots. But we have to eat all the meat, not just muscle meat as we

do today. And we need to eat a variety of vegetables on a vegetarian diet to get the protein and enzymes we need, etc..

Animals and plants can adapt within limits. There are a number of plants that were introduced here in our high altitude rainforest, some have done extremely well (because there is, as yet, no enemy that keeps them from spreading wildly). But many other plants do not make it here, they thrive at lower altitudes, but not here where nights get 'cold' (not freezing cold, but probably ten to twenty degrees colder than at sea level). Some animals can adapt to the higher altitude and colder temperatures of this altitude, but many cannot; we have no mosquitoes, few other insects, except lots of spiders; we have no scorpions and centipedes, and probably no termites yet although termites are extremely adapting, there are few areas of the world that do not have one or another species of termites.

Yet few plants and animals, probably, are as adaptable as humans, cockroaches and rats. Experts have said some can survive where Man cannot.

When I think of 'Winter', I see mind pictures of Scandinavians swimming in water freed by chopping a hole in thick ice, I see Eskimos covered in furs living in houses made of snow, I see sleds pulled by dogs, I see polar bears in glaring white expanses of ice, endless wastes in never-ending night, I see the shimmering colored sheets that are called northern lights. But Winter can also mean long dreary rainy days, winter storms, and other kinds of inclement weather that urges people to stay home, inside, reading. In modern America winter is probably a time for shopping, spending times in heated Malls and watching more TV. Europeans read much more than Americans, watch less TV.

Humans have adapted to all climates, to fierce deserts, dense rain forests, balmy beaches and mist shrouded mountains. And all that with few physiological adaptations. The blood of people living at very high altitudes carries more oxygen where the thin air carries less, and abundance of melanin (the substance that makes human skin dark) may protect us from the sun around the equator but most of our adaptations have been man-made. We adapt our life style to our environment.

Some individuals adapt better, or sooner, than the rest of us. Perhaps only a few individuals need this ability, and the majority follows their example. How else to explain the fact that when the European seafarers began to explore the globe, they did so in the costumes of their own time and country. I have always marveled at those people who were smart enough to build boats that sailed around the world, but evidently not smart enough to take most of their heavy woolen clothes off when they reached the tropics.

I have wondered about the illustrations (paintings and sketches) we have of those early travelers. Did they really sail tropical seas in such cumbersome, hot clothes? Or, were at least the lower ranks of sailors smart enough to take off their shirts? Here in Hawai'i, what is called 'ancient' hula is danced in costumes of a hundred years ago. That was the time of the missionaries, people from New England, who had strong ideas about exposing any part of the body except the face and hands...When the temperature is above 80° Fahrenheit, dancing and singing in long skirts, long sleeves, high neck, cannot be very comfortable! The reason dancers today still cling to this custom, they say, is that shortly after the overthrow of the Monarchy (1893) hula was forbidden as was the Hawaiian language. And even before, dancers had to wear those clothes to be allowed to dance at all.

We are adaptable to extremes of climate, but we are equally adaptable to climates of our own making. Humans have a unique ability to create a world that exists in their minds, a world that is not related to the world as it is. Our recorded history—only a few pages out of the book of our existence on this earth—is full of stories of societies formed around a set of ideas and assumptions about who we are that seem strange and unnatural. The daily lives of many peoples have been structured around forms of worship, sometimes extreme disciplines, absurd relationships and yet we adapted. There were humans who thought themselves gods and the rest of humanity no more than servants or slaves to the gods;

we adapted. Today there are humans who think the only reality is the reality of money, which is but a fiction of course. We adapt.

That is the dark side of our ability to adapt: we adapt not only to extremes of climate, to different environments and circumstances, but we also adapt to circumstances and environments that we made ourselves from imaginations in our minds.

Nature, plants and animals, don't design an environment, they adapt to what they find and in time the environment may well change because they are there, and perhaps they adapt, perhaps they don't. But whatever changes Mother Earth makes are the result of a process not an idea, or illusion.

The miracle, of course, is that we can keep up our fictions for quite a while, although eventually all these man-made realities must fail. Hawaiians built shelter from local materials. Of course; what else.! They also built dwellings that made sense in the unique circumstances of these islands. They made strong platforms of the lava rock that is everywhere on these islands, and on it built houses from wood poles and a thick thatch roof. No windows, no doors. Wonderfully well adapted to the climate: the trade winds we have almost the year around could freely circulate, the thick thatch helped cool the inside. Earthquakes and the occasional hurricane might blow away the roof, or disturb the poles, but with the help of neighbors and friends a dwelling was quickly rebuilt on the platform. Hawaiian houses were not used as we use ours today. Cooking food was done outside, and what we do in our 'bathroom' (what other westerners call the toilet) was done outside. All of that makes great sense in a climate without frost and without extremes in temperature.

Not so today. Building codes in these islands follow building codes for houses built in New Hampshire. And since the hurricanes that did so much damage on the island of Kauai, a few years ago, we now have to build houses that are typhoon-proof which adds considerably to the cost of construction, and makes houses rigid. That means that in an earthquake the house no longer flexes, it cracks and breaks. And I imagine that the next hurricane will show that building structures that are rigidly attached to the ground sustain more damage, not less. But the people who make the rules live in a world of standards, not a world of tropical trade winds. As many people today live in air-conditioned houses, go to work in air-conditioned cars, shop in air-conditioned malls, and swim in pools constructed next to the ocean.

Many years ago I was in the Kingdom of Tonga. One day some high-ranking government officials came to seek my help. The Peace Corps planned to send Volunteers to Tonga, and had chosen a village where they requested a house be built for the Volunteers. The house was to be a 'typical Tongan house' with some modifications, however. The Peace Corps demanded that they include a bathroom and a kitchen inside the house. The Tongans were shocked. They could

not imagine cooking inside a house, and the idea of voiding one's wastes inside a house, in the same place where one slept and sat around during the middle of the day, and next to the cooking place, was so unheard of that they were sure they had heard wrong. They asked me to talk to the Peace Corps for them, because, surely, they could not mean that...? I tried to convince these modern, educated Tongans that the Peace Corps did indeed mean exactly that. I talked to the Peace Corps representative, and he insisted that he was following Peace Corps rules. The affair of the modified house was eventually resolved, of course, but it gave the Tongans something to ponder. What could people who were so 'barbaric' (their word) contribute to Tongan development? A funny story perhaps (to us, westerners), but a story that illustrates how we tend to take our life style with us to other environments, forgetting that our life style was originally an adaptation to our unique environment and that a new environment requires new adaptations.

Man's ability to adapt has not been physiological. We have not grown a heavy pelt in order to be able to survive in the arctic. We have the ability to create our own protective shell. We never grew a shell as turtles or snails do. No, we have made it with our hands, with our smarts. This surely is an admirable and fairly unique quality among all the beings of this earth. Certainly, many animals—termites, for instance—make elaborate shelters that are effective structures, but evolution designed these shelters. Animals cannot change as quickly (adapt) as humans can.

This ability to innovate, to invent new ways of living on the spot seems a very human quality. But perhaps it is only some individuals who have that quality, the others follow. Perhaps there is a rhythm to change, if it goes too fast, many of us resist change. The end of our century shows both of these abilities demonstrated world-wide. Many countries have changed their government, sometimes their language, their name, their economic pattern. Many individuals all over the world have very successfully changed their own life to fit into the modern global economy. More and more countries we used to think of as 'underdeveloped' have suddenly emerged among the industrialized nations. Millions of people have moved from a primitive rural agriculture to modern city life in one generation. Yes, there probably has been and continues to be enormous psychological stresses, but the world's people have changed.

At the same time, other millions are resisting change. Often this takes the form of harking back to a supposedly 'good old' past (usually a fiction). Many kinds of fundamentalism are gaining ground all over the world, although different peoples yearn for different fundamentals.

It is irritating to know that our building codes no longer reflect an effective adaptation to the real world around us but it is far more important to note that societal change today is almost always away from what some call the natural world. The move away from feeling ourselves part of the natural order of things is everywhere. I suspect that will one day, soon, be our inevitable downfall. I cannot escape the notion that such alienation from what still must be the matrix of our being as a part of this world cannot last. Sooner or later, Gaia must assert herself...

For one or two hundred thousand years we survived (barely) by knowing ourselves part of creation, brother to the bear, sister to the swan. We knew plants and animals intimately. We had to. We knew a landscape well of course because as nomads we would return here next year or a few years from now. We read the wind and the rain for what to expect later today or tomorrow. We knew the seasons, and what each season provided in the way of food, shelter and danger. Life was no doubt harsh but we survived.

Then, at some point in time we invented a new way of being in this world. We were charged, we said, with the management of creation. It was up to us to make over our environment for our use. A few individuals assumed power to rule others to create this new world. With the domestication of a few plants and animals we brought slavery, territoriality (the idea that we could 'own' land!) which led to villages, town and cities, and eventually led to societies where some people had the leisure to study, to philosophize, to think about the nature of the world. But a world almost wholly of our own invention. Minds are nothing if not expandable. We thought of universes above and below the earth, gods of every description and character. And as time went on, these man-made worlds became more real to many of us than the world of Wild.

Today we think we have tamed almost the entire world.

A tamed world makes egos. Among the First People (aborigines, primitives, 'untamed' people) there are no egos. People live too close to the earth and to each other to blow themselves up as individuals. But a modern world can only exist when people have egos that make them ambitious, aggressive, competitive, always striving for more. The first really big egos in the march of 'civilizations' were the rulers who created the most astonishing structures, meant to last the ages: pyramids, sculpted mountains, cathedrals, made of stone and in modern days of concrete. Now concrete, reinforced with iron. Who can doubt that a race of beings that changes the face of the earth must be its masters.

We must not forget that this new world we have created during the last few thousand years is of our invention. The world we created comes from the minds of a few people, some of whom claimed knowledge of a Creator outside this earth, who spoke only to them. The rest of us were asked to 'believe' and if we did not believe we had our heads chopped off. As the favorite creation of God, a special people, how could we not be masters of this earth? We have an elaborate system of laws and ordinances around the idea that we can own land, plants and animals — even our children.

We still build monstrous monuments of stone and steel while millions are homeless and hungry. We all have become slaves to this world we created, slaves to a clock, to rules made and remade by those we elected to make rules for us, slaves to man-made bureaucracies and other systems that have assumed realities of their own.

And today even our rulers and rule-makers are slaves to the Media who are enslaved by the need to find (or make) more and more information about less and less to satisfy our hunger for... something. The Media in turn are owned by Corporations.

Some of us yearn for the good old days of twenty years ago. Fifty years ago. A hundred. How about 10,000 years ago, a time before humans were tamed by other humans who had ideas in their heads about what the world ought to be like.



It was not always so, of course. For the first many tens of thousands of years of our existence on this earth, we lived in small bands of maybe a dozen people; we were nomads, although we probably had a certain area that we circled. We lived together as best we could; we had no ideas about how things ought to be. Many of the things we needed to do in order to survive

were well-established paths, and each of us knew what we had to do. If occasionally there was a woman among us who had a knack for healing we were lucky. If by chance there was a man among us who was daring and adventuresome and found new areas for us to move through, we were lucky. We knew each other well, and we knew what each of us was feeling.

Then, perhaps a man found that he had a knack for getting others to do his bidding. Under certain circumstances one of those men (or women) would proclaim himself chief, or king. If enough people followed him, his sons might be king after him. Eventually those kings worked out a more systematic way of continuing their reign. Meanwhile there were others, men or women, who had visions, who spoke in tongues from time to time, who talked with the dead perhaps. One of them might even have the knack of seeing happenings before they happened. Eventually one of them must have made himself medicine man, or priest, or prophet and pope.

And when we had kings and priests our human world slipped, while most of us were asleep, into manmade societies, no longer based on who we were, but more and more elaborate constructions based on

someone's ideas about our place in the world. In one form or another we created societies that were modeled by a few for their own advantage. While the many labored. In time we created specialists: people who did healing, scientists, a whole bureaucracy of rulers, people who mediated inevitable disputes about property and propriety, others who patrolled the streets to remind us of the rules and the punishment for infringement of those rules. Until most humans today work to keep the structure going and only a few, very few, grow food.

In our eagerness to follow the leader we lost our selves. While over the past few thousand years all this progress took place we forgot to look back to where we had been. Some very important qualities were left behind, and we do not even know.



It has become second nature to 'think'. We have been trained, conditioned and educated to think before we do. We make plans, we set goals. We make lists of things to do so that our poor overworked brains won't forget something. And because we think so much we have lost the ability to feel, and probably even more important, the ability to 'know'.

Of course thinking is a gift, a wonderful way to help us adjust quickly to change, a way to learn things that help us live better and longer. We figured out ways to stay warm, we invented ways to keep food from spoiling all through bleak and dark Winters. We have forgotten that at first we also had another sense that helped us. I am sure there always were people who could tune in to a newly discovered plant and 'know' what the plant tasted like, what its essence, its 'spirit', is. How to prepare it as a food and how to use it as medicine. I am not sure that that is 'intuition', which is what some people call anything that comes unbidden to one's awareness. To me 'knowing' describes better what it is. Knowing is not learning from books, or even from a teacher. It comes to us all at once: Ah yes, that is how it is.

What I call knowing is not a matter of intelligence, which we can loosely define as the ability to think, to figure things out. Intelligence, studying, accumulating facts has to do with 'knowledge'. But what I call 'knowing' is part of being one with all being. As long as we felt we were one with the plants, wherever we found them, we felt one with animals, and yes, the cold, and the wind,

and fire and storms and rain — as long as we felt that one-ness we, or at least some of us, also 'knew' what that oneness was like, and how it could help us.

Today we have almost lost that ability, because it has been trained out of us since birth. We no longer feel one with the earth and all its infinite manifestations. On the contrary many of us obviously feel we are masters of that creation. Such arrogance! And because we do not feel at one with creation we can no longer know the nature of plants.

But I believe that that ability can be regained. Somehow the process of regaining that knack is not learning, as we think of it now. It is not accumulating facts, putting them together, organizing them. If we want to recover that ability to 'know', we must first get over our arrogance that whispers in our brains that we are better, superior, we are intelligent beings.

We are no different, we are not better, certainly not superior. We are one. That comes first.

It is hard to describe that feeling of being one with all creation in modern words. Our language—which, of course, is a reflection of our culture—does not allow meanings that cannot be verified and measured. The feeling of being one with all creation, being part of creation, not apart, is a feeling that cannot be well expressed in modern words. Fortunately, if you have once experienced it, and have felt the enormous feeling of belonging, we never forget.

I think that we lost it about ten thousand years ago, when we stopped moving around this beautiful earth and settled down, when we began to create 'civilizations', however crude those first civilizations may seem to us now. We used our smarts to domesticate animals and plants. We used our smarts to breed animals and plants, and to change our environment. We invented machines to do what our hands could not do, what our eyes could not see, what our ears could not hear. And the more civilized we became, the more we became to rely totally on civilization.

Think about that. We can no longer live without our man-made and man-maintained aids to living, like power, water, telephone, supermarkets where we buy food, the roads we rely on, our cars, refined oil to run the cars, and all the things that make it possible for us to survive. What if the power went out for two days: no lights, no news, gasoline pumps no longer pump, no water, no waste disposal, no food, no heat, no elevators, no traffic lights. Quite literally, our lives would come to a dead stop.

We could probably survive two days, but a week? Very few of us could survive on this earth as we survived for a half million years at first. We are different now, and with the difference we have lost some very important aspects of our humanity. We are trained and brain-washed to be tough, independent, aggressive, competitive. We remake the world in our image, we even remake ourselves in an image of who we think we want to be. No wonder we have lost touch with the world that is.

We seem like children in our haste to make arms, to sell arms to whoever is willing to pay, regardless of the consequences. We have made missiles to protect ourselves, which of course made whoever considers himself the enemy also make missiles with atomic warheads to protect themselves from us. And in making the missiles we were left with tons of waste material that now we do not know how to dispose of, because that stuff will stay radioactive for thousands of years. Like children we produce anything and everything that anybody can invent, never mind the consequences. We make rules and laws and then have to make more rules and ever more laws to fix the mistakes we left in the original laws in our haste to control. Of course we no longer trust any individual from doing 'the right thing' because we no longer know what the

right thing is. Like children we act before we think, we rush ahead full steam in all directions.

It seems we cannot stop. We tell each other, Of course we cannot go back. Why not? Is it not the smart thing to do to retrace your steps when you see the abyss in front of you? Everything we have done with our smarts has consequences that nobody apparently considered. Now all these consequences are looming in front of us. It seems that smarts by themselves are not enough to assure our survival. We need something more. Something that, if we were given the time, we might learn (children do grow up to become responsible adults after all). The something more is not necessarily the ability to foresee consequences; we can do that now, but the movers of this world do not want to change. No, the something more must lie in our motivation, wanting to change the direction in which we are speeding, wanting to act with awareness.

As long as we think only in terms of our own profit (not even considering our own children, let alone other children and their children), there is no hope for our survival as a species. As long as we give power to those who abuse it, we are lost. As long as glamour is more valued than wisdom, how can there be a change in awareness?

The reason why I am so attracted to moa, the little plant I have written about in earlier newsletters, is that it is incredibly ancient: it has survived several ice ages, unbelievable earth changes, even the ascent of Man. Moa is a pared down plant, it has no roots, no leaves, no flowers. It is almost invisible, it is the essence of modesty.

I am certain that it has survived immense changes because it is so simple. One of the simplest expression of Life.

10 October 1997



## #12

There are days I call ‘nothing days’. On those days — and fortunately there are not many — I am suspended. It is as if my feet do not touch the earth, I feel unconnected to the stream of life. Today was one of those days. It rained, then drizzled, then rained again. The sun came out once, around noon, but evidently did not like what he saw and hid again.

I hid too. I hid from myself as well as from everyone and everything else. It seems impossible, but most of the time I did nothing, I thought no thoughts, I felt no feelings. Even the plants were silent. Not a pleasant day. Not a bad day either. Just a nothing day. Now I am back.

Of course that was only on the surface. I discovered soon enough that deep down something had been working, my mind had been puzzling something, my heart had reflected. Perhaps the nothing day was nothing because I was too busy being inside.

What I puzzled about is not easy to write down in a few sentences. And maybe it is something that is none of my business to puzzle. I feel so strongly, in the deepest part of my being, that we humans are not born to be mean and greedy and paranoid and violent. We were born to support each other, to work together to make our lives full and wonderful. I believe — I know! — that we are a part of this whole earth, part of the wind and the rain and the rock and the trees, the plants, the animals.

I have experienced living with people who take that for granted, people who have lived that way for thousands of years. That is how they survived, by thinking of themselves as no different from anything around them. It’s a wonderful way to be.

We, on the other hand, by moving so far away from what we were born to be, have become less and less human. That hurts me. I wish I could share with you that feeling of being one with all that is.



The evening of the nothing day I watched some TV. Boring, and shocking. Bright illusions were spun for our ‘entertainment’, actors mouthed lines they did not (could not possibly) mean. So-called news was bits and pieces of happenings here and there that had no relation to me or to the people I know. All designed, it seemed, to lull us to sleep. Don’t think, television screams. Don’t worry, the advertisements blare. Drink your beer, eat your salty crackers so that you will want more beer, and snore. Almost all the humans one sees on American television are beautiful, slick and alluring pictures, not real people, and they seem hard and crude and rough.

I am fortunate to have many friends, here and everywhere, who are warm and real, who love and laugh. But we seem so few among our own kind. And why is it that we—who I think of as the downtrodden, the minority certainly—have such a hard time to maintain our integrity?

Hawai’i in many ways is a microcosm, it is the world reduced to an island, the earth’s population reduced to a million or so. Many people are poor, a few are rich. The native population is disenfranchised but struggling to get their pride and their culture and their language back. There is growing violence, as everywhere else. There is despair and hope, as everywhere. Hawai’i has immense beauty and concrete ugliness side by side. The ecology of

islands is more fragile, and so the destruction of the environment is more visible here. But we also have people, many people, who are trying to bring back the health of this land, the ocean, the water and the air.



Perhaps it is a characteristic of civilized humans to think of others as less. We have a hundred ways of put-downs. From physical abuse (I am stronger than you) to verbal abuse (you are stupider). More subtle forms of put-downs are invented and take over, to show by our actions that the other has nothing of worth.

That is probably what colonialism is, taking over the land and resources of a people, bringing in new and probably more technologically sophisticated equipment to do a job and in so doing shoving aside the way natives did that or similar jobs. Whole nations, whole 'races' (a very inexact word, in America assumed to have to do with the color of one's skin) have been put down by having been forced to accept another religion, another language, another way of doing things. The introduced ways can mean only one thing: that the old ways are useless, invalid, unimportant, at most of touristic value ("the quaint customs of a quaint people").

I am certain that most westerners think that their way of seeing the world is the only valid way. We 'own' the world, is that not proof that we are more powerful, and therefore right?

The most difficult thing for all oppressed peoples (and today that is almost everyone who is not white) is to withstand that western way of thinking. Western civilization is now world-wide, and so overpowering that non-westerners can only speak of their own ways of life in comparison to this modern so-called civilization.

Non-westerners must explain themselves in English. They can never 'prove' their ancient value and validity in western terms, western language, western law or western science—as it is impossible to prove the value of, say, acupuncture using western medical science as a standard. How does one measure the greatness of, say, African sculpture? African sculptures are the expression of an ancient African religious experience that is essentially different from any expression of any of the western authoritarian religions. Acupuncture is a technique rooted in an ancient Chinese world view, completely different from the present western world view.

When studying Hawaiian religion, the first thing a westerner looks for is who, among the many Hawaiian gods, is the 'main' god? What if none of the Hawaiian gods and goddesses were thought of as the one and only creator? Hawaiian deities, as deities all over the world probably, are thought of as part of creation, as humans are part of creation, inseparable from other aspects of creation. For instance, the goddess Pele is the essence of volcanoes, of lava, fire, destruction but also, at the same time, of creation of land.

When a westerner visits a native area he will ask 'what kind of government do you have?', meaning is it democratic or a monarchy or autocratic, or a dictatorship. But what if this group of people has no government? Impossible, the westerner will say, who makes your laws, who enforces them? Huh? What are laws? Why should we make rules for ourselves and then police these man-made rules, if we live as our ancestors have lived for as long as there have been people? Our people, they might say, live by the laws of nature.

For many years, during the years that I traveled, I would ask people what plants they used for

healing? I expected their answers to tell me that they used this plant for such and such a condition, and another plant for headaches, and something else to treat boils, and so forth. It was only with great difficulty that I finally understood that, of course, other people might not think of 'diseases' as a fixed group of symptoms, as we do in the west. Chinese medicine, for instance, diagnoses the body's condition moment by moment, and prescribes combinations of herbs specific to now, to be taken at a certain hour

of the day. When I go back to the same healer with what I would think is the same 'disease' tomorrow, he might give me a different set of herbs.

The Chinese have never had a religion that worshipped a single creator. It is we, who profess a belief in one creator, who have a great need to create order in the world around us, by capturing what can only be the flux of life itself in named boxes. We have tight definitions for what is a fever (a temperature greater than...), we know in great detail how each organ does what it is meant to do but we know less about how they interact and form one whole. One I took a patient to a doctor who gave the man a paper back full of different pills. This one to take with food, another without; two times a day, four times a day. I asked the doctor how all these different medicines interact in the body. He looked at me and said, I have no idea.

As I understand it, the pre-contact Hawaiian culture was rooted in an intimate and powerful relationship between the people and the land, a relationship that cannot be expressed in real estate values because the land could not be owned by Man (true in most cultures of the non-western world). How else could people think who had traversed half of the Pacific Ocean to arrive at these tiny specks of land in the immensity of water that covers one third of the earth's surface? Of course land was of the greatest importance, revered, cherished, nurtured and loved.

Today that almost mystical relationship between people and the land of these islands is still very much alive. But it is so difficult to explain in modern English that Hawaiians often find validation for this bond in 'blood'. Only those who have Hawaiian blood can apprehend this relationship with the land, they say. But, whereas the mainland US is a multi-cultural society, Hawai'i is truly a melting pot. Probably most of the people are mixtures of many races and nations and nobody keeps count what percentage of one's heritage is Hawaiian. My ancestors were of many cultures, and for myself I know that that heritage is not what makes me feel at home here. The assumption that if you do not have the blood you cannot love the land, the 'aina, seems limiting. But I understand it. How else to explain, in terms of our western culture, this relationship? And not just explain. As soon as something is explained in western terms, it becomes western.

There is a famous painting of the goddess Pele, which shows a Polynesian woman with hair that is fiery lava, streaming down, making the shape of a volcano. I doubt that any Hawaiian has ever thought of Pele having lava hair! Pele is a goddess, she is also a woman! A fiery, dangerous woman, fickle in her loves, with many lovers, her 'work' is to destroy and make land, to belch forth lava and noxious fumes from the innards of the earth.

Many Hawaiians believe that Pele can take forms that we recognize: the form of an old woman, dressed in rags, or the form of a little white dog in the middle of a lava field, with no houses or roads within miles. There are many stories, modern stories, of people who have met this old woman, have given her a ride in a car, or given her directions, who later discovered that their house was miraculously spared when lava flowed all around it. My children and I have seen

the little white dog in lava still so hot that it would be very unlikely that a dog might have strayed there. A moment later the dog vanished.

No, The Lady Pele is not a woman with lava hair, she is a force of nature.

I do not believe that a man with Hawaiian blood has a genetic sense of belonging to this lava that I could not feel as well. But I also know that to many Hawaiians that is the only way they can hold on to something that is uniquely theirs, that we cannot steal from them, as we have stolen their language, their religion, their world view, their dance, and of course above all their land. We have even appropriated what we call The Aloha Spirit to entice tourists to spend their money here. We have given streets Hawaiian names (almost all misspelled). The State flower is a red hibiscus, which is not a native plant but was introduced by us.

As I have said before in another 'newsletter' I cannot see how the systematic destruction of a culture and so of the soul of a people can be healed by laws or pious expressions of regret, and certainly not by money. But sooner or later the Hawaiians and all the other First People of the world must reclaim the validity they have lost because of our sometimes subtle and usually crude and cruel oppression of a way of life they valued. To me it seems obvious that if we are to become one world in truth (not just consumers in a global economy that profits a very few), if we are to become one humankind, we must come into this community with a strong sense of our own value and respect and accept other values. An American can never be more 'worthy' to be a world citizen than the poorest beggar in Calcutta or a naked aborigine in Australia.

Our worth does not lie in the number of telephones we have, or the horsepower of our cars, or the number of bathrooms in our mansion. It can only be found in our own sense of being whole.

And how can we be whole when our roots are no longer in the earth but in our imagination?

I have heard it argued by politicians and scientists that the meek of this world must be educated first to be able to take part in civilization. No, that is upside down, inside out, thinking. It is we, the so-called civilized, who must relearn to see and accept the validity of those we have so callously pushed aside.



I have a great need to live simply. I would love to be able to generate my own electricity (the technology is there, but it is expensive). I wish I could do without a car, perhaps with a bicycle, but living 30 miles (50 kilometers) from the nearest town with one bus a day, which leaves early morning and returns late afternoon, I do not have much choice. I have a minimum of clothes, my diet is simple, my recreation is my garden. But almost daily I experience that the world we have created does not allow simple. In order to eat we must earn the money to buy the food (few people grow their own any more). In order to work we must learn things that often are wrong, against the stream of life, we must arrange our life to conform to an unnatural pattern of clocks and paved roads.

We talk freedom but we must do what others tell us to do, think as other people force us to think.

And, of course, some of us see what we are doing, what all of us are doing. But we have to live in this world, we must deal with money, we must treat each other as our culture tells us to treat others. How do we break out of the prison of civilization?

In my dreams I am living as part of a group of people, aboriginals, or First People as they are called now. We need not talk much because we understand each other without words. We all 'know' what is happening around us without having to rely on 'news', many of us also know what is going to happen. We collaborate because we are one. We cannot fight (any kind of fighting) with each other because if I hurt another I feel her pain.

All of that, and more, much more, is what I think of when I think of 'human', when I think of who we once were.

What have we gained? — washing machines, computers, banks, fast food chains, instantaneous everything.

Those thoughts go through my mind when I think of conversations I have had with people who tell me, Well, surely, you cannot want us all to go back to be primitives?

Well, no, not 'back' — although we may have to become primitives again if...

I think what those people mean is, 'surely I would not want to give up my computer, or my car, or the conveniently packaged food I buy, or the mattress I sleep on, or...'

Yes, I could do without a computer. I did, most of my life. I could do without books even, if I had others to share thoughts with. I could do without the food I buy; I did, during many periods of my life. I can sleep on the floor, on a mat, I have done that. And I can attest that a woven bamboo floor or even dirt is softer than a concrete floor. Yes, I could give up my car if it were possible to live without it.

I would love to be able to do without money! And I do not mean having lots of money so that having enough is not a problem. No, I mean do without money altogether. And I know from experience that most of us adjust to that remarkably well, and quickly, if it is necessary. During the last year of the war there was money, but nothing to buy. Almost instantaneously and without any governmental planning, we adjusted. When there is nothing to buy, money has no value. To survive we bartered, maybe a gold ring for some wheat, or carrying a message for a loaf of bread. What little food there was could not be bought with money, but it could be bartered.

And that is how it was before. We did not call it barter, but that is what people did before we invented money. One person cooks, another makes canoes, someone is good at building, someone else is a healer, another person hunts. It was simple, direct, and it 'worked' for thousands and thousands of years. In that world nobody could accumulate canoes and become 'rich'—if there are too many canoes, they are worth less, not more. Money on the other hand becomes more the more one has, they say.

So, yes, I really do believe that we would all be a lot better off if we could go back to simple living. With each other, with the earth, the trees, the plants around us. We would cherish what is left of Wild. We would cherish each other for our true talents, talents of the heart, the mind, the hands, for who we are, not for the diploma we have earned in a school.

One step, perhaps the first step in our learning to be simple humans, is to learn detachment from the civilization that surrounds us on all sides. Certainly it is wonderful to have electricity that some company sells me. I can enjoy it, but it is not essential. I love my computer, but I know I can live without it.

Perhaps then we can come to appreciate and value those who never had those man-made things. They are not any less because they never had an opportunity to buy a car, or fly in an

airplane. A person's value lies in that s/he is, not in what s/he owns.

Those of you who know me, know that I live well, but perhaps that is because I think rich. I do not have lots of money, nor do I have a large income. But I do not lack for anything. I could do with less, and some day I will. In my dream world we love our fellows as ourselves.

Do you realize that means we must first love our self?



Many of us feel a growing sense of powerlessness, a tenuous and labile sense of self worth. In this country one's self worth may well be closely correlated with one's skin color and social class. Middle class white people feel secure, non-white people of the increasing number of classes under the middle class feel more uncertain and uneasy about themselves. They feel powerless, and in fact they are.

Some people say that thinking about something makes it so... That might be true. But if it is true, then it seems a lot more effective to think about making things better. How can one make anything better without first knowing what is now. For me, 'better' would be less. Less of everything. Less worry, less money, less restlessness, less powerlessness, less whatever.

Perhaps a big reason why we think we cannot go back to simpler living is that we have learned to expect progress. Every new gadgets, more of everything. And because we focus so hard on the expectation of more, we can no longer see that we are pursuing an illusion. Is it not obvious that in a closed ecology, as this earth is, there is more only at the expense of something else? More wealth for me means more poverty for someone else.

A life without expectation... We who think we are in charge of this world are blind. We who think we must plan and create our own future, forget that life is not planned but grows. Our paths through life meander, sniffing a rose here, avoiding a fire there. Being led by expectations of a movie romance, the happy ending of a book, riches beyond imagining... For what? Those are not the things that count in our old age, and we all know we cannot take it with us!

When I have expressed these thoughts, there is always at least one person who interrupts, "It all comes down to power." Shorthand for, What motivates people who drive our society is the obsession to get more and more power where 'power' means power over someone or something. What is miraculous, and almost unnoticed, is not that some people live for acquiring the kind of power that changes the face of the earth, — the miracle is that we have created this concept ourselves. It is not a natural phenomenon. We talk about the world as a jungle, predators eating prey — but humans are not predators. We have removed ourselves from the ecology of this world. The only predators left that are hunting us are microscopically small. But does that mean that we in turn can hunt everything else (and each other!) to extinction?

Predators and prey are closely and naturally tied to each other. If predators would kill more than they eat, if they were to kill the vigorous and fertile, rather than the sick, the prey would have fewer offspring and predators would go hungry. As predators die of starvation, prey would reproduce abundantly and eat all the grass. The year after there are fewer prey and predators go hungry. Eventually a sort of balance is achieved that can continue for many years.

Scientists have only lately come to understand these ground rules of ecology. Before we were civilized this was common knowledge. But what scientists know, politicians and big business still

have to learn. They think the earth is a bottomless gift box. We know that is not true, of course, but yet we go on exploiting our earth at ever faster rates.

That does not demonstrate our intelligence as a species. In an earlier world knowledge was shared, today it filters down slowly, slowly...

Perhaps the human species is reaching a turning point of destiny: either we are going to make it through, or we will die out. Yes, species die, as humans do. Sometimes species die because other species eradicate them. Occasionally, it seems, species die because of something they do themselves... Death, even of a species, is hard to face, therefore many of us don't want to even consider. Or else we imagine that the future must be 'wonderful'.

We cannot know the future. We cannot know what the next hour will bring. I must live as if Now will smoothly fold into the next moment, even though I know, from experience, that this is not always true. There have been such breaks in my life. I woke up one morning to find that the world as I knew it — and as I imagined it would be tomorrow, only more so — had ceased to exist. At first I thought, as everyone else, that sooner or later the world would get back to where the break occurred. That, of course, never happened. The world from before 1939, the year WWII began, has gone and will not come back. In fact, yesterday will never be repeated.

I consider that to be perhaps the greatest Gift I have received. I have often been lucky, I have certainly been privileged. Learning to accept that 'things change' irrevocably has been the most useful lesson I learned!

Facing our destiny we need to face inward, not backward, nor or forward with blind eyes. We need to remember who we really are (were), and that knowledge is inside us still.

In my writing and speaking there was often an attempt to convince an audience that living in a more communal community does not mean the loss of identity. Most readers and listeners have the idea that if one identifies with a village, or tribe, then he cannot have a well developed ego. And, in our society, what is more important after all than a strong ego, an identity, a self? We admire people with strong egos, people who are go-getters, who set goals and achieve them, people who make large amounts of money, who have 'important' positions in society.

But there are societies where self, striving, or goals are unknown. Such a society was the groups of Sng'oi, Malaysian aborigines, described in my book. Now, when remembering those kind people, the first thing that comes to mind about each individual is the strength of his or her personality, a uniqueness. Not ego, but individuality blended into a group. Many women were strong, some of them forceful and outspoken, others quiet, almost withdrawn. But when it came to an important issue they had a definite opinion and did not hesitate to express it. Little girls were learning to be strong and dignified. Men sometimes had the strength of a unique quality or talent, and boys grew up in the certainty that they were valued for who they were.

Perhaps the ones most easily remembered are the ones who had the strongest identity? Could be... However, the settlements were so small, rarely as many as a dozen people including children, that it is not difficult to remember all the people of a group, even after so many years. They certainly had individuality, but not ego. Yet, with their individual identity, they were still first and foremost a part of the little group

they lived with. In some settlements there were perhaps blood relationships, but most groups were people who had been raised elsewhere, and through a partner or through some other happenstance now found themselves in this group.

Moving around was not at all unusual, and so it is quite possible that some of these adults would occasionally wander on to find another group to share another part of their life with. It took a while to discover that. Visitors see a homogenous group of people who live a simple life that seems traditional, unchanged for centuries. Western visitors immediately look for pairs, Hah, this woman and that man are 'obviously' a couple, and those are their children. More often than not, however, relationships were not that clear. There was a young girl in one of the settlements (difficult to guess her age, pre-puberty certainly, maybe ten years old) whose mother had moved on last year, but she, the girl, had decided to stay with this group. There were other blood relatives, but the girl chose to stay with an old(er) woman (not related) who lived here. Perhaps the ties to the community were part of the tie they felt to the world around them. The community was just a facet of the rich pattern of trees, animals and plants, soil and sun they felt so closely connected with. Their identity was human-as-a-part-of-nature.

Note: this last section was an exercise in writing as the Sng'oi speak. They rarely if ever use the word 'I'... Try it some time, it is almost impossible to write English without using that word 'I'. Only English perhaps capitalizes the word for me. myself. Is it to emphasize its importance?

15 November 1997



## #13

Closer to the end of another year. A time of celebration and reflection.

Some of us might forget the reflection because we are worn out from the celebration, but what are we celebrating other than an incredible abundance of things? We overspend to buy things nobody needs. I wonder what happens to all those things that pass from hand to hand, or languish in cupboards and attics. Perhaps that is why garage sales and second hand markets have become such a fixture in this society. I found a perfectly wonderful hat at the dump the other day. Here, where no garbage person comes to pick up our garbage, we bring it to a nearby 'collection station'. It has become custom, when someone gets rid of something that is too good to throw in the dumpster, to put something that is still usable on the side for the next person to find. This hat was once an expensive hat from a fancy hat maker. It fits me.

We are told that buying keeps the economy healthy. The more goods we buy, the more workers can earn money making more goods to be sold tomorrow. There seems to be a flaw in that argument, but what do I know; I am not an economist. Only an economist could seriously propose that making more and more things nobody really needs leads to wealth and prosperity.

The so-called primitive people I knew—who do not think in terms of owning things—seemed a lot happier than we are, and perhaps more telling, their life style served them well for thousands of years. They did not run out of oil and soil as we are. I cannot imagine that our life style as it is today will survive much longer. Despite the hoopla of politicians who proclaim that our economy has never been better, it is only better because there are more very rich people now, but at the same time there are a lot more poor people now than ten, twenty years ago.

'Primitive' is not the right word for people outside the western world. They are not primitive, although their economy seems primitive to us. Some scientists talk about pre-agricultural people. For a while we talked about the Third World (which is rapidly catching up to our world in terms of money and things). Today we talk about First People: the people who lived here first, before we came on the scene. First People almost everywhere live intimately in their environments. They live without the doubts that assail us. They do not have as many choices; that may make their lives poorer, from our point of view, but it also makes them much more secure as individuals. They cannot be alienated from a world they know they are a part of. They know who they are, they know how they fit side by side with the rest of creation.

They do not try to control their world, as we do. For long ages their world did not change much, or it changed relatively slowly. That was good and safe.

We insist on 'change', and thus we cannot escape that frightening sense of sliding, slipping, losing the knowledge of how to survive in a world where things change so fast that we cannot keep up. Daily we hear of workers laid off because a factory has moved south of the border, or to China or Malaysia where labor costs are a tenth of what they are here. Our politicians tell us that is good for the economy. Really? They say that the workers must re-train to fit into our exciting new Information Age. Steel workers must learn to operate computers. Politicians rarely talk about those of us who were happy doing what we did before and we do not want to change our career when we are in middle age. But willingly or not, we are dragged along the path of 'progress'. Eventually, we are assured, workers who

were laid off will find work again—ignoring the statistics that say many of these workers now

earn minimum wage at a fast food chain.

The gap between this world and the world of non-western people gets greater every day. The gap is not just the difference between western know-how and primitive poverty: the gap is a chasm between points of view. Primitive people have no governments, no leaders—although when Westerners insist on speaking to ‘whoever is in charge here’, someone can usually be found to play that role. They have no police, no trained and licensed ‘professionals’. They do not have laws, although everyone knows the way things are. Primitive people live in a world where everything is intimately and totally related to everything else. People remember how to just ‘be’. There are no theories, no rules particularly, except the human-ness that is inside all of us. People who live in the Wild, live like plants and undomesticated animals. Plants grow, blossom, make seeds, eventually they die to make room for other plants. And dead plants make compost that feeds other plants. Plants do not deny their plant-ness in order to acquire wealth. Wild animals do not aspire to become domesticated pets.

We do our best to put some man-made order in the plant world. We make gardens that have flower beds and borders and lawns, and there in the corner, in front of the huge plate glass window that looks out at our neighbor's' garden we plant some ornamental willows in a planned random arrangement. Low-growing plants should be in front, so that the higher-growing plants can be seen in the background. We match the colors of blooms, or we breed plants to bloom in colors we like better. For thousands of years people never imagined making gardens. Primitive man knew a lot about plants. Naturally, because plants fed them. Primitive man grew up with plants the way they were. They knew that some plants like shade, others bright sunshine. Some plants grow in bogs and watery ground, others grow in deserts. That way almost everywhere something will grow. Some plants need rich, deep soil, and there are other plants that don't need much soil at all. In fact there are plants that do not need any soil, they get what they need from the air, from rain, and sometimes from what other plants and trees provide for them. And that is as it is.

When we started to make gardens, we changed plants. Humans had known for a long time that some grasses had edible seeds, but the seeds were tiny and it took quite a while to get enough for a meal. We probably knew that some kinds of grasses happened to have fatter seeds that were easier to harvest. So some very smart human figured out how to fertilize a plant with big seeds with the pollen of another plant with big seeds. What he did, of course, was not letting chance determine what the offspring would be like, but he took a hand in making plants with bigger seeds. And that is how we got the grains that now form the staple diets all over the world.

In a similar way people probably learned how to domesticate some species of animals, and how to breed animals for a specific purpose, either as a source of meat, or as helpers on the hunt, eventually even as companions.

All this paid off because we could grow more plants in a smaller space, and so get more food — and more people. Today we have made the world serve us and us alone (we think). Many people believe that the entire world is there for us, to feed us, amuse us, to supply us with minerals and oil for the machines we have created to make life easier.

I suspect that we never thought about what the consequences might be of our plunder. It seems likely that the plants of this earth do not do well in an artificial environment, without the

random breeding

that happens naturally, without the rich variety of other species all around. It is well-documented by now that for instance mono-culture (growing one crop and carefully removing all competing plants from that plot of land) does not work. Mono-culture invites disaster. If there is a bug (microscopic or insect) that loves that particular plant, it is inevitable that those bugs will find the plot, and in all this abundance they breed and make more bugs, until there will be so many bugs that they eat the crop that we planted. Today we have learned how to make chemicals to destroy the bugs, but also inevitably, sooner or later some of the bugs will become resistant to our poisons.

It is hard to accept that we are fallible, that we can make mistakes. It is even harder, it seems, to accept that although most of us know that what we are doing cannot last, yet we continue to do it. We know that there is a limited supply of oil, but that does not influence our choice to use oil today, and more oil tomorrow and yet more the day after.

We know, scientists know, that continuing our present pattern of consumption does things to the air and the water of the earth that may very well have dire consequences for our children. We seem not to care.

These are some recent News stories I came across: —A committee that studied air traffic in the US (and world-wide) reported that in as little as ten to twelve years the number of ‘major’ aircraft crashes will more than double throughout the world. Too many planes using air lanes that are too crowded, depending on air traffic control that is out of date even now, airports that are too congested. Only 20 years ago air travel was wonderful, comfortable, exciting — sometimes there was even great food. Now air travel is something to be dreaded. Here in Hawai’i, where planes are the only way to get from one island to another, the officially recommended check-in time now is 90 minutes before departure — when from one island to another takes at most 45 minutes, and most hops are about half an hour and less. —Even here in the tropics some people celebrate Christmas as if we had snow, ice and dark nights. ‘Real’ Christmas trees are imported from mainland America, harvested a month or more ago, on sale here from the beginning of December. They last at most a week indoors in the tropics. A housewife on one of the islands found a dead snake in her tree. Of course this tree as every other tree that is brought into Hawai’i had been mechanically and visually ‘inspected’... (Hawai’i prides itself on being an Eden without serpents! and we have very stringent controls on what people bring in). —A new highway on the island of O’ahu was opened. It tunnels through the mountains that run the length of the island, as two other highways do, connecting Honolulu and the communities on the windward side of the island. Journalists call it ‘The most expensive highway in the world’ in construction cost per mile. So of course they were quick to interview commuters. Yes, it reduced travel time on the other two highways by an estimated 4 minutes. Now they will get statistics on traffic density, number of traffic accidents and deaths, so that we will know a year from now that this third highway relieves traffic elsewhere. Of course, we already know that in five years it will all be as it was yesterday.

What would the world be like without the Wild? Look around you.



Here are some of my wishing dreams:

— I dream of a time when ‘research’ will be the study of those kind of wonderful qualities some, or all of us have. — Would it not be exciting if schools taught young humans how to feel others’ needs, to understand what is grand and fine in our neighbors. What if one grew up expecting to ‘know’ which of two choices would be the right one?

— I can imagine a world in which we would spend our time helping friends, neighbors and strangers. — Imagine that ‘PRACTICE RANDOM KINDNESS AND SENSELESS ACTS OF BEAUTY’ were reality rather than the bumper sticker on my car. —What if scientists received generous grants to study pre-cognition. In my dream world people will no longer want to name phenomena with latin-sounding names/ How about the science of dowsing, knowing where there is water, or where one could find a certain kind of metal. — In my world there are classes where we will learn how to blend knowledge of plants with food gathering and preservation, where we study the science of medicinal herbs and how to use plants with kindness and mindfulness. And, of course, sustainable. —I dream of an age when ‘news’ is sharing wonderful, miraculous happenings. I wish I could show you the exquisite shape and color of the datura blossoms that came out after all the rains we had. The color is an almost unearthly salmon/orange/pink, and the shape is a large but delicate trumpet, with curled streamers on the five sides (some people call this plant Angel’s Trumpet). It is truly a work of the most miraculous imagination and of course it is stunningly real. —What if a talk show would discuss ways to help others grieve; or late night television would talk about premonitions and signs of change from all over the world. —How about a world where people get together to be still, a world where we help children find their own unique, special path.

Ten thousand years ago some of us chose to control rather than to know. We chose more rather than better. Can what we chose be unchosen?

All the good and great things we can be are within us. All we need to do is step aside and go inward.



Daily I am reminded by blaring advertisements and by every single program on radio or TV that a large percentage of the world’s population is busy buying presents and tinsel to celebrate end-of-year ceremonies that have absorbed so many customs from so many different peoples that the mixture now only means BUY!

A few days ago, leaving the rest of the people do what they do, a friend and I went to an isolated piece of land that has been in her family for generations. As most ocean fronts on this island, there is no beach, only jagged shiny black lava rock pounded by surf. The ocean was calm that day, but still the surf gave an infinitely varied rhythm to the background sounds that were like the beating of the world’s heart. Funny, waves do not come in series of three, as surfers like to think. The surf that day, in that section of the coast, was whispers for minutes at a time, and then suddenly it boomed. Maybe two booms, then whispers again. But there was no recognizable rhythm, except of course that there was never a pause, it went on and on and on, always.

Coconut trees were densely close together on this land that had not been ‘used’ for many

generations. None of the trees had been harvested for a long time so they were laden with coconuts in all stages of ripeness — and obviously there had not been a hurricane to cut the trees down, or at least remove the crowns of trees. Other vegetation was denser green of a hundred different shades, climbing on and through each other. Some plants had fruits, as the coconut palms did. Other plants were in a growing phase, some were in bloom.

The scene had such a quintessential tropical ambience that it brought tears to my eyes. The surf was not the only rhythm, there were also a thousand pulses of life force of plants and insects. This could have been any other island in the Pacific, or in Asia, with the same slate-colored ocean, ubiquitous coconut trees and their filigreed leaves silhouetted against a dark horizon. To me it felt like 'home'.

It was cool enough so that we were not bothered by mosquitoes. Or, perhaps, since this place had not been visited by people leaving garbage in a long, long time there were no mosquitoes.

The dog obviously loved this place. She frolicked here and there, played with fallen coconuts, every now and then checking back where we were sitting to give us a lick on the face, then off again to discover more wonders.

This was real, an almost primeval world as it must have been for a thousand years and is no more almost everywhere else. We humans surround ourselves with trees planted in rows, plants cultivated for the color of their leaves or flowers. The wild can only be found in isolated places, inaccessible. Or fenced to keep people out.

Why is it that we, humans, spoil places like that ocean front?

We were careful not to leave traces of our visit. We had no cans or paper napkins or bottle tops to discard amid the sharp edges of lava. We left no footprints in the lava or in the lush carpet of a dozen different ground covers. The ocean took no notice of our presence.

We who live on this island are lucky, because there are still such isolated ocean front beaches left. Fortunately (I am almost ashamed to say that) most people are not interested in fairly inaccessible, lonely beaches. We are a social species, we like to congregate where others are with boomboxes and beer...

The living peace of that land, that ocean, the surf, palm trees. lives on in my soul. It was not the frozen stillness of barren north lands, nor the peace of a lagoon in sunshine. This was peace found in the natural balance of the rich fullness of all forms of Life. It was impossible not to feel the life force of all that green, the heaving of the ever pumping ocean, of trees reaching high, vines climbing everywhere, the least weed creating more chlorophyll to make more oxygen for the rich air that flowed around us.

A reminder of Life before we came on the scene, and probably as it will be a million years from now — with or without us.

I came home to my mountain retreat to find different plants, equally rich and balanced — old friends. Very different from down below, but as vibrant and alive. My orchids are now in full bloom. Not as 'showy' as they would be in a vase, but to find them sometimes almost blending with an abundance of green leaves is more stunning I think.

Oh, this is a beautiful world!



Recently a friend responded to my talking of the Wild in a letter. To him the world outside of civilization was a scary and unpredictable 'chaos'. Others also have said that they see chaos as the opposite of civilization. Many people feel that a civilized world is the only safe one. To them the Wild is full of beasts and unknown dangers. Civilization protects us from the dangers of the unexpected, they think.

Was that the intent of those of those who formed the first 'civilization'? We wanted to create a world that would be more predictable (and therefore safer) than the world of nature? Banned or killed all creatures we did not like. We built walls around human settlements as a way to protect ourselves from the Wild. We domesticated plants and animals to have a more reliable source of food. And slowly but surely the order we created expanded beyond our walls.

Then the people living within these walls began to think themselves different from the people living within other walls. We marked boundaries. Inevitably we found that then we had to defend ourselves not only from wild beasts but from the people in the next territory.

Then we discovered that the enemy is not outside, but within. The more 'law and order' we must establish the harder it is to survive. Lions and poisonous plants are not much of an enemy compared to other humans. So, now civilization must control not only the dangers of nature, but more and more it must control people. We can only live within our stockades if we fit in, we must do this we must do that, we cannot do the other.

When we come from our ordered world to a chaos outside, many feel disoriented. In the last ten thousand years we have learned to be sardines, headless pieces of protein squeezed in a metal can. How to remember that once we were alive?

In the very long ago when there were wild beasts in the Wild a cave lion might have eaten us, we might have drowned in a sudden flood. And in civilization we can get run over by a car, shot and killed by the random violence rampant in cities. We can freeze to death when the power goes out, or drown in the headwaters of the Mississippi that can no longer be contained by dikes (in this country called levees) we have so laboriously built to control the world.

I would much prefer to be killed by a tiger, than die in a hospital, submitted to indignities primitive men never imagined. Yes, I almost certainly will live longer in this civilization than I would have in the Wild — is longer better? I have experienced 'chaos' a few times in my life. I can attest that it is not as bad and scary as people say!

The chaos of years of war was as dangerous as anything humans ever experienced in the wild. Worse, because our fellow humans are by far the most lethal enemies we have. But I survived. I had to quickly learn other behaviors, another way of seeing the world — I did.

Living in that chaos taught me that I am strong. And more than that, I am flexible enough to survive when the rules suddenly change. Living in the chaos of a tropical jungle taught me that the chaos of the natural world is much preferable to the chaos created by my fellow humans. Nature's chaos is full of life and some death.

Manmade chaos is full of death and some life. Living in the Wild taught me that we have capacities and abilities that we have forgotten, neglected for too long.

We pretend that this world and its rules must go on 'forever'. Perhaps only those of us who are artists, and who have sniffed the fire of creation, can remember, with another part of our knowing, that chaos is all around us. Chaos is the stuff of creation and creativity!

Many of my friends identify with what is now called the New Age Movement. To me, the

period we are entering (some have called it the Aquarian Age) is not about love and peace, but a time where humans must learn to live with the 'chaos' of having no pre-conceived solutions to the many questions we gave birth to.

The world is not going to get simple — ever. Ecologists tell us that the more complex an ecology the more stable; the simpler the more fragile. Problems will not go away.

Solutions, I believe, must always be ad hoc, specific to a time and place and a people. Precedence misleads, because it favors the old solutions and prevents us from looking for new ones. I try to live as if every moment is a miraculously 'new' experience. Today's sunshine is miraculously different from yesterday's, it is like no sunshine ever before!

That does not mean I have to reinvent the wheel, of course. I take for granted that the machines I rely on will do what they were designed to do. And if they don't, there is something wrong with them (not with me). I take for granted that the sun will come up tomorrow, although I also know for a fact that one day it will miraculously not come up for me.

It is so sad to see that we have only one answer for all problems of human behavior: lock 'em up, put 'em away, throw away the key. And we have one answer for all problems of the environment: do what we did before, but with more force, more power. That is also how we fight our wars. If one bomb does not do it, try ten bombs.

Solutions cannot be that simple, because a real solution requires rethinking and even perhaps finding a completely new way of approaching the question.

Maybe what we need most urgently is the ability to ask questions in such a way that solutions do not automatically hark back to what was tried before and did not work. Surely, we are intelligent enough to know that if a solution did not work yesterday, we need not try the same thing today with more force — almost certainly it won't work today either.

I think the Aquarian Age will be a time of innovation. It will be a time when we must all learn to think — think in a new way, not memorize what we did before. Personally I think that in order to think in a new way we must learn to ask new questions. It is amazing how difficult that is.

In a far future I see, faintly, a world where people work together for the good of all; where people probably live in small villages, not cities. A world where the healing arts strengthen the immune system, not kill diseases. A world without telephones where anyone can instantly communicate with anyone else; a world with footpaths only, because if we want to see a friend who lives at the other end of the world we do not need a car or an airplane, we just move ourselves there. Almost certainly we, humans, will be much fewer than we are now. In that future world each of us grows what we need and no more, we will use energy from the sun, we have learned that our needs are simple. We will surround ourselves with the beauty of the Wild, and cherish the wild in us. Who knows, there might be tigers...



It is always exciting to move across that invisible boundary that marks our years. Who knows what next year will bring? Probably—almost certainly!—some good things and some bad, some old patterns but also wonderful surprises.

20 December 1997

## #14

This winter the weather around the world has been 'unusual'. First we heard of monstrous forest fires in Sumatra and Borneo, Indonesia, that spread dark smoke clouds over parts of Southeast Asia. Then a drought in Australia that apparently killed much of their banana and citrus crops. And unusually cold weather in other parts of the world, storms that did great damage. Last month there were ice storms in both the east and west coasts of America.

Here the changes have not been storms, but a drought. Last month we did not have our usual trade winds: where I live we have not had any rain for more than a month (serious when you rely on rain water for all water needs), and also because of the absence of wind, combined with a new activity of our ever active volcano, we have occasionally been shrouded in 'vog' (volcanic fog), a foul smelling thick haze that damages many plants and makes breathing difficult for some people.

We are told that this drought will continue for many more months (some say until April, others until June). Despite using severe water economies here at home I shall have to buy water, and because our roads are narrow it has to come in a small truck, so perhaps I must buy water several times... I take tiny showers; I have a bucket in the shower to catch what I can; I flush the toilet once a day. I do not suffer but the plants do. The grass is still mostly green although I have not had to cut it for more than two months (unusual). The wonderful mosses are completely dried up. Many plants are losing leaves (perhaps a water-saving mechanism in plants?). I use dishwater and what other water I can save to give a little here and there, but if this goes on for a long time I wonder...

These changes make me take notice again of how closely our world ecology is tied together. The 'cause' of all this strange weather is called El Niño, a phenomenon, the weather people say, characterized by heating of the eastern South Pacific ocean, around the Galapagos islands. The ocean there is so much warmer than it usually is that it has killed some small marine organisms, which in turn threatens the survival of some rare land-dwelling animals. The warm ocean makes changes in the jet stream, that river of air that flows around the earth in ordinarily predictable paths.

Nobody quite knows why El Niño occurs, it seems to occur in cycles of ten or more years (but this one was only a few years after the last). It may also be that Mother Earth is reacting to the eradication of her rain forests everywhere and to destruction of landscapes almost everywhere else. Cutting the rain forests is known to affect the weather. And very possibly covering large areas of land with concrete and asphalt, as in cities, must change some weather patterns as well. The longer such a changed pattern of weather continues the more other effects will be noticed. If our drought continues for months, as they now expect, it may well effect what our small part of this island will look like. The availability of water, after all, is what determines what grows here, and what animals live in these woods — there is little soil.

In normal times we have more than 100 inches of rain (approximately 2.5 meters) per year, but what is probably more important in an area with little soil to hold the water, rainfall is not too different from season to season. There are periods of less rain and more rain, but a real drought such as this one is rare indeed. One would expect that effects of a prolonged drought will be felt much more in parts of this landscape that are extensively developed — which means



the original forest is removed, the ground often covered with gravel (easier to build on than lava). In such areas, I would guess, plants will feel the effect very quickly, whereas here where around my little house there is still a fairly thick forest, enough moisture must stay in the ground to keep things green for now.

I have noticed that in the area immediately around Volcano Village imported species of plants suffer more than native species. The distinction between native and imported is fairly artificial, I think. Not long ago, measured in geological time, these islands rose up from the ocean, bare rock, without any vegetation at all. All plant and animal life of these islands is 'imported', brought here by the wind or ocean currents and later, much later, by humans. The many different peoples who found a home here brought plants and animals with them, a process that has greatly speeded up in the last two centuries, particularly in the last century, and most particularly in the last fifty years.

When a plant is imported here (and we have brought plants from all over the world) it will soon find where it thrives in this new land. Many times these imported species of plants find no natural enemies and so can spread like wild fire, often pushing aside plants that were here a longer time (called 'native').

But now with an unusually long spell of very little or no rain (and air so dry we do not even have dew in the morning), the kahili ginger plant, one of the aggressive imports, seems severely afflicted. They are visibly more affected than for instance 'ohi'a and other plants that were here long before. That means?

Kahili ginger must be dependent on abundant water, and probably also relatively clean air. 'Ohi'a trees on the other hand are tough, they learned long ago how to grow in little cracks in the lava before there was much soil at all. 'Ohi'as can survive with hardly any rain or with a lot of rain, and they certainly must have learned to live with occasional volcanic fumes.

'Ohi'as have many survival features, they have air roots so that in the event the tree falls over (for lack of soil) the air roots can immediately take over. 'Ohi'as also have strangely flexible, 'drooping' branches every now and then — branches that can find a new patch of soil a few feet further on and take root there. 'Ohi'as often root in tree ferns, and when the fern gets too heavy and falls over in a strong wind, the 'ohi'a turns its branches up and continues to grow (frequently the tree fern turns its crown up as well and continues to grow).

Perhaps a continued spell of dry weather would spell the end of kahili ginger here, or it might change its aggressive, invasive behavior. Changing environments favor plants with the most adaptable survival strategies and on a volcanic island it makes sense that the plants who have been here longest (have survived for some thousands of years already) could be expected to do best.

Our change in weather has also had another effect. The dry weather is caused, they tell us, because the jet stream—that river of air that flows from west to east around the earth in the norther hemisphere—is 'misplaced' because of El Niño. The usual trade winds are not blowing over these islands any more. That means no rain clouds, so that on the many days there is no vog here the sun shines from a high, clear sky with hardly any clouds. The absence of clouds also means that at night temperatures plummet. Morning temperatures this last month have been around 40° Fahrenheit, between 4° and 5° Celsius. My house is not built for such cold. I have no central heating, no insulated walls, no double windows. And because there is little or no

wind, it takes until noon for my house to heat up to the temperature outside (at noon usually around 70° F, 21° C). Amazing how the heating of one area of the Pacific Ocean has made more rain in some parts of the world, less rain in others!



Humans fight for territory, and in this century we fight for ‘ideologies’. But in reality this is one earth of course. What happens here affects lands at the other end of the world, and vice versa. And although

people living in cities (and that is more than half of the population of the earth today) may have forgotten, what happens around us affects us here and now, immediately. A continued drought here means I have to buy water from ‘down below’ where there is ground water. And because buying water is not in my usual budget, it is an extra burden, and probably I cannot afford to water the plants as I would want. I assure you that plants drying up or otherwise being unhappy would severely affect me.

A good friend lives in Hilo, the nearest city on the coast, north of here. Recently her neighbors decided to cut a row of trees that marked the boundary between the two properties. These trees were perhaps 100 ft. tall, certainly old (a hundred years?). As most trees in the tropics they were home to a wide variety of climbers and plants that lived on and in the trees. Birds nested in them, lizards made their home in them, and there were probably many other smaller animals dependent on those trees.

Cutting such enormous trees required fancy modern equipment, a crane, huge chain saws, and other machinery. But apart from the hellish noise it was easy to feel the ‘pain’ of the trees and of the many forms of life that depended on them as they were cut up.

Now, after the wood has been removed—the stumps, almost at ground level, are between 8 and 10 feet across—another effect shows: the removal of those trees has affected the entire neighboring landscape. Plants that grew up in shade suddenly stand in blazing sunlight 12 hours a day, although they do not stand any more, they wilt. The soil which was moist and covered with ground cover of one kind or another dried up in a few days (the drought is in Hilo as well as here). It is obvious that the neighborhood cats and dogs have lost their bearing and must redefine their territory. Birds who have lost their nests fly around in confusion. I am sure the lizards and other little animals who lived in those trees are equally confused.

That made me realize that the extinction of animal species is not only the result of the destruction of habitat, but can just as well result when a habitat is severely disturbed. Building a primitive road disturbs the landscape and may well split animal territories. A paved road disturbs the landscape more. Clear cutting even a half acre lot disturbs the landscape and dangerously affects water run-off.

Although we know that selective cutting disturbs a forest much less than clear cutting, we also know that selective cutting is not done today for economic reasons. Today we think that we have to use machines to cut and haul trees, and machines must move on wide paths. Machines require clear cutting and thus immensely increase the damage we do to landscapes and the plants and animals that live there.

A few years ago I met a man—then in his late forties or early fifties—who had been a wood

cutter all his life, until he realized he could no longer do that. He had little education, although he was obviously smart. He had never lived anywhere except in wood cutting country. He had been married, he had children but when he announced that he no longer wanted to cut trees, his family refused to understand what was so important about trees. It was more important to support his wife and children, they said, and since the only thing he knew to do was to cut trees...

But, as he told me, obviously in great pain, he just couldn't. He felt the teeth of the chain saw in the fresh wood of a living tree as if they were tearing up his own skin. He heard the trees cry, he told me.

I was moved to feel his agony, but I could not forget that he is an exception. Most humans are not aware of what they are doing, they do not feel the teeth of the chain saw. They do not hear the trees cry, they cannot sense the earth bleed, they cannot imagine any good except money.

I lie awake at night wondering about this. What happened? How did we evolve from humans who felt part of this wonderful earth to people who do not care about the earth, who can no longer feel the energies they are disrupting and interrupting in the complex ecology of earth and plants and animals and weather we live in. Somewhere we have changed our priorities, now all that counts is we, humans, and everything else in the universe is subject to our whims and desires.

It seems so obvious that all and everything is related to everything else. The winds that flow around the earth affect every part of the land and the sea, an unusually high temperature here affects the weather thousands of miles away. Perhaps—probably—our very thoughts affect the ecosphere we live in, even if most of us do not 'feel' that.

What happened — who/what have we become?

Humans, homo sapiens, have been on this earth for many thousands of years as part of all Life on earth, part of the whole mantle of life that surrounds this globe. Then, suddenly, we began to believe that we were Lords of the earth, and we set our minds to proving that we were.

Scientists have different ideas about how long homo sapiens has been on this earth, but whether it is a long time or a very long time, for at least 90% of that time we lived in harmony with our many environments. For only a small fraction of our time on earth have we declared ourselves its master, and have done our best to destroy whatever environment we do not like. We have exploited resources as if there is no tomorrow. We have eradicated species and generally destroyed what I call The Wild.

As this drought is visibly harder on some plants than on others, this and other changes in climate and other factors may be harder on some people than on others.

Do human newcomers to these islands suffer more from changes in the ecology (economy) of these islands than 'natives'—however we define natives? When things get tough, will white people go 'home'?

The first people to come here were what we now call the Hawaiians. They probably came from the Marquesas, in the South Pacific, around one or two hundred A.D. A second migration, from Tahiti, came shortly after the year 1000 or perhaps 1100 AD. The Tahitian immigrants were similar but not the same as the first immigrants. It is probable that the Marquesan Hawaiians had to work very hard to survive the first few hundred years. The Tahitian Hawaiians came to a series of islands that were already settled; the biggest work had already been done. The

Tahitian Hawaiians brought a rigid class system, with nobles (chiefs, both male and female) and commoners — no need to ask who were the chiefs and who the commoners.

Then again several hundred years later, a little more than 200 years ago, Captain Cook discovered these islands — Europeans used the word ‘discover’ to mean that an island, or a continent, was brought to the attention of the west and usually claimed by the ‘discoverer’. Ever since then the ‘native’ population has been displaced by those who came after, first white people, whalers and missionaries. Then the white people brought in Chinese, then Japanese, Portuguese, Filipino, and a hundred other nationalities.

When Captain Cook came one of his officers, after a survey, estimated the total population of these islands at 5-800,000 (all ‘Hawaiians’, of course). A hundred years later, the first census counted less than 50,000 Hawaiians — less than 10% of the original population remained. Today it is impossible to count how many Hawaiians there are, because the ‘natives’ were friendly and unprejudiced people who freely mixed with visitors. The number of ‘pure’ Hawaiians is probably very small, but there are many people who claim Hawaiian ancestry. Sad to say, even counting people with no more than ‘some. Hawaiian blood, they are a minority in today’s Hawai’i. But then, all racial, ethnic, religious groups are minorities. There is no majority population here.

The state of Hawaii spends more than it earns, we are ‘broke’, the economy is slipping, jobs are hard to find. Tough times may well demonstrate that Hawaiians have more survival skills than white people whose survival skills seem to be creating a new environment rather than adjusting to the environment as they find it.

In the end human survival must be a matter of accepting the world as it is, not controlling the world in order to change it for our pleasure. I spend some time each day in meditation. For me ‘meditation’ means getting out of the way, stepping aside, and allowing to come into my mind what happens to come — without judgment, without even naming the thoughts or images that float through my awareness.

Sometimes what happens to come into my mind is something I have been thinking about but did not resolve yet. Modern psychology talks about the ‘sub-conscious’, a supposed awareness that works beneath our awake awareness. By stepping aside we allow the subconscious to come into awareness. That is a figure of speech, I do not believe that there are different kinds of consciousness, as Freud and Jung and almost every psychologist after them has stated. I believe there are degrees and ‘dimensions’ of awareness. Most of us go through life using only the mind, the brain, which we have trained to resolve problems using what we call ‘logic’: ‘b’ follows ‘a’, straight line cause and effect thinking, do not get misled by ‘intuition’ (random thoughts that appear unbidden into our awareness) because that is ‘fantasy’. That kind of thinking, scientists say, comes from (or takes place in) the left side of the brain. On the right side (the right hemisphere as it is called) we feel, free associate, make illogical jumps from one thought to another.

To me it seems a waste of our human capacity to discount everything that is not logical, to accept mostly what comes from the left brain. The most important insights probably come from thinking that involves both the left and right hemisphere of the brain.

But regardless of whether the insights we get in meditation come from the right or the left side of the brain, from something we think of as ‘below’ consciousness of the awake state, fact

is that frequently in meditation insights appear by letting our mind flow without censoring, without judgment, without naming.

It takes some training to be able to allow thoughts to come into your awareness without judging — this thought is dark and dangerous, another thought is ‘dirty’, or yet another thought is an old familiar thought that cannot tell me anything new. As one of my earliest meditation teachers said, thoughts are like leaves floating on the wind, let them float, do not make them more important than that. Just leaves on the wind...

It is even more difficult it seems to not even name or describe these floating thoughts — this thought is about love, another thought-leaf is dark green, or fresh and new, or wilted...

Another teacher told me to not be involved with these random thoughts that come to you in meditation. ‘You are just watching the thoughts go by, you are not involved, like seeing things out of the corner of your eye.’ That kind of unfocused meditation is relaxing, and sometimes it is a way to let go of tension, of problems. You just let it float away.

Sometimes I also meditate on a theme, as I think of it. For instance, after my last newsletter several people remarked on my suggestions that we look at problems with a new perspective, from a different point of view. It is difficult for some people to even imagine how we could possibly look at something from another point of view. In meditations I asked myself ‘how does one learn to see things from a point of view that is other than the obvious one’?

Speaking more than one language definitely helps because a language is more than a collection of words and some rules. Language is in a very real sense the verbal expression of a people’s point of view, it defines what is important. There are famous examples of language expressing a people’s reality: Eskimos living in the far North have 14 words for snow (because the different aspects of snow are vitally important to them). Languages of tropical peoples have many different words for rice, because rice is a food that is eaten at every meal (in Indonesian, for instance, the verb ‘eating’ is ‘makan nasi’ which literally means eating cooked rice).

Or, imagine that your language has no expression for past, present and future. There are only two words: here and not here. Not here in that language (Zuni) can mean at another place, or at another time. It is obvious that speakers of that language think of ‘time’ very differently than we do. Or, what if a language has very different words than we do for personal relationships. In many languages it is not possible (or very impolite) to speak of ‘my’ wife, ‘my’ children. For speakers of those languages a wife and a child cannot be thought of as ‘property’. It is easy to imagine that in the culture of speakers of those languages children have a very different place: from a very young age they are thought to be whole persons, never anyone’s property, and certainly not empty slates as we seem to think.

The Hawaiian culture has an interesting slant on relationships. In the Hawaiian language there are two words that express our word ‘my’, recognizing that ‘my parents’ is different in an important way from ‘my children’. In Hawaiian the relationship between me and my parents is a given, the relationship between me and my children describes a choice: I chose to have children. The ‘my’ when I talk about parents is ko’u, when I talk about (my) children is ka’u. My house is a non-choice — I may choose where to live, but everybody has to live somewhere. Similarly ‘my’ friend is always ko’u (everyone has to have a friend). There is a third form, ku’u for a ‘my’ that describes a very dear relationship, perhaps one’s very best friend. All family relationships are

either 'given' or 'chosen'. Confusing when you learn the language, but I came to understand the finesse of being able to describe nuances that cannot be expressed in English except with a lot of words. Obviously, how one is related is very important.

Modern English is unusual for having only one form for 'you'. Many languages have different words for 'you', expressing distinctions of age, social class, or degrees of respect. In America this universal you has become an expression of a belief that all people are the same (equal?). Other cultures recognize differences. In America we also use first name with anyone — perhaps that is why 'intimacy' in America is so difficult to achieve, there are no words any more to express different degrees of intimacy.

While a language is probably the best way to learn something about a culture and about how people of another culture see the world, today virtually all the world's cultures are on view via television. One can hear the music, see the dances of people from all corners of the world. The National Geographic has seen to it that everyone has access to all the world's landscapes. With a bit of imagination it is not too hard to feel what it might be like to be a 7 foot Maasai surrounded by the African veld with its abundant wildlife, or what it would be like to know the world as a cold, white place with not much to eat except what can be found under an icy ocean.

Perhaps in the end seeing things from another point of view is first of all a matter of wanting to, and being able to accept that there might be other points of view, that my way of seeing is not necessarily the only one, or 'the best'. That openness probably requires being critical.

A day or so ago I saw part of a show on television which set out to 'prove' that it was greed that made the world work. We were presented with endless examples of how government really does not work too well, but business does. The message was, greed is good... The whole show struck me as a true example of proving the obvious: when a society is based on greed, obviously greed works best. Being critical, however, such reasoning proves nothing at all.

If I decree that in my house it costs money to turn the water on, meals at my house must be bought in cash, using the telephone costs so much a minute — then, obviously, it would be money that makes this house work (naturally my house does not work that way) If on the other hand what I value is not the telephone, or the power that does many things for me, but I value the sun, the land, the plants — then money has no place in that world at all.

The world of nature 'works' without money or greed. In fact, it is money that has just about destroyed that world.

Living in this society with its overwhelming Media bombardment presenting and promoting one solitary point of view, it becomes very difficult to see there might be other ways to see reality.

But it can be done and it is worth it.



Today I watch with growing concern and sadness what is happening to the plants in my garden. I know that I cannot 'save' the plants I love with recycled dish water. The drought is bigger than my sincere desire to help plants survive. Mother Nature will do what she does, and in the end she will abide.

5 February 1998

## #15

Twice these last days I have had the same dream. Not exactly the same of course, but obviously giving me the same message. In fact, I have had this dream a few times before. The story each time is different, with different people, different scenery, but the meaning is the same. This last time I remember being aware when I dreamed that it was going to be ‘one of those dreams’, and I watched myself with some amusement, wondering what the story would be like this time.

The first part of the dream—and the dream always has distinct parts—takes place somewhere away from my home, the last time at a beach house with comfortable people. The first part of this dream always seems to be ‘pleasant’. I do not know these people, but they are friendly, charming, we laugh and have a good time. The setting is also very twentieth century, luxurious in fact.

The next part of the dream begins with my moving away, I have to go somewhere, I travel—sometimes in a car, sometimes on foot—this time I was swimming with some of the people of the party along a river, or a canal perhaps.

The third part of the dream begins when I leave the others, or they leave me, and I find myself alone, always in a large city, with large buildings all around. I start out confidently, knowing that I have to get home, or get back. And each time, in these dreams, sooner or later I am ‘lost’.

This time, again, I found myself in an area where big projects were going on, big trenches had been dug by monstrous machines, confusing my sense of direction. I could not get across those trenches, nor could I find a way around.

Thinking back on this and the other dreams I realize that the light is subdued in this part of the dream. It seems to be dusk, a sort of colorless half-light, where shadows disappear and edges blur. I have to strain to see in the distance. In the dreams I did not exactly panic, but I felt increasingly uneasy. In some of these dreams I asked people for directions but not this last time because by now I knew that the people in these cities cannot help me.

I realized that what I needed to find in order to find my way back is something green, a blade of grass, a tree, a flower, anything alive, of this earth.

This last time, only a few days ago, again I looked for a green leaf. It was hard to see in the dusky half light, but I knew that something live would stand out. I walked along one of the deep trenches, rocks and dirt heaped on both sides. On the very edge of one of these ditches I saw a clump of dried grasses. I approached anyway, thinking there might be a green blade left inside the tuft of brown leaves. As I reached out my hand to the clump of grass, loosely resting on the dirt, it slid into the ditch.

I woke up. Or I woke myself up, because I knew even in my dream that my search for something from nature would be all around me, inside my house as well as outside. It was only a few hours after midnight. Much too early to get up. So I stayed in bed, snugly warm under the blankets (it is cold here in the morning!), and thought about this dream and the others like it.

The meaning of these dream of course was simple: I must center myself in nature, I need to touch green things, Life, in order to be ‘home’. I already knew that but there are times when I forget, when my life is lived almost entirely in the man-made world of appointments and work to be done, making money and obligations. When I feel myself drowning in the cruelties and

insanities of the man-made world, I feel 'lost' as I was lost in the dreams.

The idea of finding something green to get me out of a place of confusion and insecurity first came to me some four years ago when I was interviewed on television. Before the interview began I was asked to sit in one of the chairs set up on a little platform in the middle of a huge hangar-like studio so that the technicians could adjust the lighting. What seemed like hundreds of enormous, bright lights were adjusted one by one to focus on me. On the platform were two easy chairs, arranged 'casually', probably to give the viewers the illusion that this was a warm, comfortable environment. In fact it was extremely cold and bleak, but on a small screen it may have looked cozy.

When a woman came to put a bouquet of artificial flowers on the little table between the two chairs I realized that I was feeling extremely uncomfortable in this huge space that was entirely artificial. I went outside to find 'something alive'. The technicians laughed and said nothing green would survive under these lights. But I found a juniper bush just outside the studio door.

I picked a small branch and held it in my hand during the entire interview: 'my connection to the real world', as I thought of it. In the dreams that thought was woven into a little story, as happens in dreams. Although in the television studio I felt uncomfortable, in the dreams I felt lost.

I am fortunate that most of the time I do not have to make appointments and accept obligations. But I am still part of this late twentieth century world which intrudes into my quiet life among my wonderful plants and a few animals who come to visit. As I get older, I need peace and quiet around me, and I need the life force that I find in plants and animals. Perhaps because it gives me strength, but more, I think, because the natural world feels more 'real' to me than the man-made world.



In the nineteen sixties or perhaps early seventies I read a very important book, *Five Ideas That Changed the World* by Barbara Ward. The theme of her book was that the great changes that we observed even then, originated—had to originate—in 'ideas'. In order for human societies to change it was necessary that first a large number of people (perhaps not 'all' but probably 'most' people) accepted and acted on the idea that change was possible.

One of the five ideas she mentioned (unfortunately I no longer have the book, and I cannot remember all of the five) was the idea that it was no longer necessary in this modern age to accept one's fate, so to speak. It was possible in this racing post World War Two world to change one's life, move to 'the city', study for a whole new career, get the latest gadget, make money.

In the past people did not imagine that they could change what was ordained at the time of their birth. If they were born paupers they would stay poor the rest of their life. Born a prince, always a prince. People generally accepted the place in society they were born in.

Societies almost everywhere were arranged around the idea that everyone 'of course' accepted such inflexible expectations. India had the institution of Casts. European societies were ordered around the idea of social classes (lower-, middle- and upper-). In America there were white and black races. In Hawai'i there were commoners and nobles. Nowhere was there a way



that a person could escape her/his place in society.

Then, in the second half of this century, people all over the world heard, believed, and acted on a different expectation, namely that with hard work and dedicated effort (and luck!) one could change her/ his position in society. In western societies we believed that education was one of the ways we could better ourselves. In other parts of the world people found and invented other ways to get out of their

assigned 'roles'. People everywhere began to get the idea that there must be ways to lift oneself out of circumstances inherited from one's parents.

As Barbara Ward observed, these ideas truly changed the world. For the first time there was a growing and widespread belief that it is possible to change one's circumstances. Before we can do something to change ourselves or our circumstances, we must believe that it is possible to do so. According to Barbara Ward—and it is hard to find anything wrong with her observations—this century became the century of enormous changes because people for whatever reason began to accept that they no longer needed to accept the poverty they were born into, or their Caste, the social class of their parents, or any and all of the boundaries that had existed before.

The result was literally a changed world. Fixed systems were overthrown everywhere. In India the Caste system became illegal. The United States, which prided itself on being a classless society, nevertheless saw major social changes as a result of the intense demand for change among Women, Blacks (now called African Americans), and many other groups who for the first time acted on the belief that it was possible to change their position in society.

And from the idea that change is possible, we went to the idea that change is 'good'. We now call it Progress.

Looking around the world as it is at the very end of this 20th century it is clear that the enormous changes that happened, particularly in the last fifty years, caused as much pain and suffering as the changes promised to alleviate. The idea that one could improve one's lot made people everywhere move from the country to the cities, so that today almost half of the world's population lives in cities, most of them in more squalor and poverty than they ever knew when they lived on the farm.

An important consequence of change brought about by the idea that it is possible to 'do something about it', was the universal improvement in basic health practices (hygiene, better nutrition, more medical facilities) which caused an unimagined increase in babies and children surviving the first few years of life, and eventually a great extension of life, people now died in their 60's and 70's where before the average life expectancy was in the 30's or 40's. A consequence of these changes was the enormous population growth we have seen in this century.

It is difficult to imagine that these changes, and many others, have been always 'good'. Even more difficult perhaps to see them as 'Progress'. In order to feed a world population that is probably five times as large as 100 years ago, we have had to intensify agriculture, growing more calories per acre, which could only be done with the application of increasingly toxic chemicals.

I cannot escape the notion that after these 'Five Ideas' (and others) had indeed changed the world, we have now arrived at a point where change is changing exponentially. Change has become a god, we demand change, we crave more and more 'improvements', 'development',

new this and that. The global economy is based on the necessity of continuous 'growth'.

It is clear that the sheer energy of this steam roller called Progress is so immense that it cannot be stopped.

And yet, even a little reflection tells us that we must stop. This obviously cannot go on. Human population cannot increase at the present rate 'forever'. We know for certain that at some point (whether it is 50 or 100 years from now) the oil that is still in the ground—making the energy our world runs on—is

going to run out. We are frantically expanding against all natural laws. Our earth is burning up with a fever that is still increasing, and the increase itself is increasing.

The fact that our jails are bulging, that there is an increasing number of poor people in this country, that a sizable percentage of the people need anti-depressants to function, that all manner of therapists are busy doing what they do — surely, all that and more suggests that these improvements have not made us happy.



There is more and more discussion about the need to 'change the paradigm'. It is obvious from the pieces I have read that different people have very different interpretations of what that word means. Some use 'paradigm' to express a basic point view that underlies a culture, to others it means boundaries, I have seen it used to mean the values or even the morals of a people. What all these writers have in common, I think, is that they see that we need to change the way we go about living, working, thinking, operating...

Considering Barbara Ward's observations, it occurs to me that what is needed is, first of all, an IDEA of how we want the world to look. Great changes are born in the minds of humans, and require that at least a certain number of human beings share a common idea of where we want to go.

It is easy to see the need for change. It is incredibly more difficult to see how to change, and in what direction we want to go. Most of the things I have read seem to assume that a desirable world of the future would include all of the technology of today, and more of it. We are told that our form of organizing ourselves is the best there is, although it can be improved. Everyone seems to suggest that what we call 'democracy' may have some flaws but all it needs is to be cleaned up. Do we believe that?

My 'idea' is that we must question everything, and that the best way to create something truly new, is to go back to basics first. What can we learn from the past? Not yesterday, but the yesterday of long ago.

To most of us 'history' means the last few hundred years. To scholars it usually means up to 2000 years ago. From what we now think we know of where and when humans first came on the scene, it appears that we have been around for at least a hundred thousand years ago. We know very little about ourselves in those earliest years.

We do know that humans obviously moved around a lot. We spread from Africa, where scientists now think *Homo sapiens* originated, to all over the world. We are fairly sure that there were fewer of us for many thousands of years, perhaps never more than one million people in the entire world. We probably did not live even half as long as we do now. We also know that

some of us made amazingly wonderful art, paintings that survive in caves, carvings that survive in archeological digs. We know that we must have learned to hunt well, and that most of the food we ate was 'gathered'. We found food rather than cultivate it.

Nomads who hunt and gather must have known their world very well indeed, and they obviously could not afford to destroy it. We survived for many thousands of years on what we found or hunted.

What we know about those early people is sketchy. But we do know that eventually most of our ancestors became farmers, doctors and lawyers and all the other specialists we know now.

The so-called civilized people of the last few centuries who energetically explored and colonized the entire world had little use for primitive hunter/gatherers. Quite casually our ancestors were eradicated.

However, fortunately in a few places on this earth, small remnants of those early people survived into the early part of this century. A few, very few anthropologists have studied them, a few writers, very few, have written about them. But what we have learned from them, whether they were found in Africa, Southeast Asia, Australia, a few islands of the Pacific, the Amazon basin, and a few, very few other locations, is so similar that it seems reasonable to assume that humans, before agriculture, all had these qualities.

Laurens van der Post, one of the writers who wrote about the aboriginal people in Africa, the Bushmen of the Kalahari, writes that these primitive people 'could not be tamed'. That is the major fact all aboriginal peoples shared. The difference between their 'paradigm' (the way they thought of themselves and the world, their point of view, their way of life) was so different from ours that they could not 'adapt' to our way of thinking. Van der Post writes that if a Bushmen was put in jail he died that same night. No doctor could ever pinpoint a 'cause of death'.

There were other qualities the various remnants of the ancient peoples had in common. — They were joyful and rarely seriously ill, until civilized man brought the civilized diseases to which they had not been exposed before and to which they had no immunity. — They were peaceful, they hid or fled from an enemy, human or animal, avoiding confrontation. — They had no government, no laws and no police. — And they had an inner 'knowing' that came not from learning but from dreams and the oneness with what is. Some writers observed that the aboriginal people they knew seemed to 'communicate without words'. —Linguists reported that these remnants had sophisticated languages, richer than modern ones —and all known aboriginal groups had cultures in which dreams played an important and central role, to an extent difficult for us to understand.

The similarities between peoples living so far apart geographically that they cannot have influenced each other, suggest that they indeed must have been remnants of what humankind must have been like before agriculture. The most isolated of these groups, the Aborigines of Australia, are estimated to have been there for at least thirty thousand years, and probably longer. And they had (have?) that inner 'knowing' that came not from learning but from dreams and the oneness with what is.

My own experience with one such remnant group confirmed many of these observations. Now, thirty years after the time I knew some of the aboriginal people in Malaysia, it seems to me that the greatest difference between them and us is that they thought of themselves as part of all

creation. We think of ourselves as somehow apart from nature, from plants, animals.

We believe, and have believed since we invented agriculture, that we are the managers of this earth. The earth and all that is on and in it, is our charge, we say, and it is our possession. We can and do exploit it, use it, change it to please or profit us. The world to us is a 'thing', an object not a very alive, always changing whole..

Aboriginal peoples thought of all animals as our brothers and sisters, the earth as Mother, plants were thought of as 'the same stuff' as ourselves. And I am not using metaphors! They experienced themselves as an integral part of the globe, its plants and animals, rocks and rain. They could not conceive of 'owning' a piece of the earth any more than they could 'own' a cloud. In fact, the idea of ownership was unknown to them.

Now I know that this intimate relationship with all that is, is almost impossible for a westerner to understand, to feel.

And yet... when I see how we think of ourselves today, and what kind of world we have created, I cannot help but think that where we went wrong was at the junction where some humans turned to follow the path of being 'other' (other than animals, other even than other humans).

It seems so obvious to me that we cannot deny that we are part of this globe. Even our 'spirit' is part of this globe. I see that point of view (paradigm?)—the acceptance of ourselves as part of all nature, equal to other creatures—as the first and most important idea that we must rediscover if we are to change course from the direction in which we are going today.

I cannot imagine aliens from the Pleiades rescuing us. Why would anyone smart enough to travel across this galaxy want to deal with a species greedily exploiting and depleting its planet and so destroying itself? We may be smart, but we have no sense.

I do not believe that somehow, mysteriously, we are all going to become 'spiritual' before it is too late. What is 'spiritual' anyway? Humans survived thousands of years without religion, or 'God', but with a strong feeling of belonging to 'What Is'. To me that is a mysterious, miraculous, very spiritual feeling.

It seems clear that since it is we who have gotten ourselves in this mess, it is up to us to get us out of the quicksand we are stuck in today. We must rediscover the idea of being part of this globe, and from there move forward, or back, or sideways to a peaceful and sustainable world.

People often ask me, But surely you do not want to go back? No, of course not. We cannot go back. But I cannot help but feel that we have exchanged a very rich and very human experience of life for the conveniences we have become addicted to: bath tubs and micro waves, air planes and instantaneous communication via telephone. That tells me that the new marvel, the internet, sometimes called cyber space, is not really a different space at all, it exists in the copper and glass wires of our telephone lines that span the earth. The internet is a very fragile 'net' indeed. It has become unimaginable to think of a world without electricity which we ourselves generate. But for almost all of our history we survived without.

We are paying a very high price for exchanging an inner knowing of belonging to the earth for 'things'. The price is not only alienation, but happiness, contentment and joy.

That feeling of belonging to the earth, being part of all creation, fortunately still exists among many of the First People who are still alive. I use the term First People for the tribes and nations who lived, mostly peaceably, in areas often stolen by those we now call 'civilized' people. Many

Native American groups, native groups of people almost everywhere, the early Hawaiians are First People. Their survival also is severely threatened, but fortunately at this late hour they have found a voice. They remind us

with ever stronger words that their belief that we are parts of Mother Earth is too important to throw away as we have thrown away their and our own ancestors.

No, of course we cannot choose to become primitive again, but I am quite convinced that we cannot continue as we are. To me it seems obvious that we must remember who we were meant to be and create a future from that insight. We are not 'other', we are not above or separate from other beings, we are part of this earth, its rocks and its Life.

**The illiterate of the year 2000 will not be the individual who cannot read and write, but the one who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.**

**Alvin Toffler**



In the last three months our rainfall has been about one tenth of 'normal'. Now, occasionally we have a day of mist or fog when there is moisture in the air. Undoubtedly some of that seeps into the earth but I have not mown grass in three months and it is getting quite brown. It is good to experience this, it makes me deeply aware of the blessings of water. I do what I can to preserve and recycle it,

22 March 1998

## #16

Yes, the drought seems to be over, at least here in Volcano; other parts of the island are still bone dry. I am fortunate, my water tank is full, and the plants are back on their regular Spring schedule. The tree ferns unfurl their large leaves with abandon — the big difference is that this year because they had to wait so long, now two, three, even four leaves are all coming out at once. The power of growing things is palpable!



There is an old saying (attributed to the Bible, but I think it must be older than that): Ask and you shall receive. For me it also means ‘point your attention and you shall find what you are looking for’.

As you know I have an enduring fascination with primitive people. Not because they are colorful or exotic, but because I feel that they can teach us important things we have almost forgotten, things we need if we are to survive. In my continuing quest for written information about these almost forgotten people, I ‘pointed my intention’ to sections of that marvel of modern technology, the bookstore on the internet. The one I like best is called Amazon.com Books; there are others.

Real, physical bookstores often intimidate me: there is simply too much to take in. My favorite bookstore on the internet says they have a quarter million books, but I do not see them, they do not detract me with miles of bookshelves reaching to the ceiling. On the internet I can ‘browse’, go from here to there, read—at home, on my own computer—what others have said about a certain book. Occasionally I can read some pages from a book that looks interesting. Or, I can see what other books people have bought in addition to the book I am looking at.

A few weeks ago I ordered books that seemed to be promising additions to my library on First people, indigenous people, aboriginal peoples.

That same week I received a gift from friends (thanks again T and S), *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight*, by Thom Hartmann. The back of the book says, “...Thom Hartmann proposes that the only lasting solution to the crises we face is to re-learn the lessons our ancient ancestors knew—that allowed them to live sustainably for hundreds of thousands of years—but that we’ve forgotten.” That is exactly what I also believe.

Of the four books I had ordered, three gave very similar messages, stressing the importance of learning from ‘primitive’ peoples.

The fourth turned out to be a how-to book: by following the easy lessons in the book ‘you too can be a shaman’. I do not appreciate books that simplify what cannot be made simple. This book, one of many such, demonstrates what I think of as the dark side of the rediscovery of ancient wisdoms. By making an ancient way of life ‘accessible’ to people living in our modern age, assumed to have no time to really go deeply into any subject, one trivializes a way of life, a discipline (a ‘yoga’). Currently shamanism, if there is such a word, is popular. But popularized shamanism is decoration, to be shown off next to our Navajo rug, an African sculpture, a picture of a Balinese girl. It is not real.

The other books that came into my house that week showed me that obviously there are others who feel strongly about the crises of the world we live in, and who have come to very similar conclusions, namely that the only way for humans to have a chance to survive the coming Chaos is to look back into our own past—far back into our past, to before we became civilized.

Again, I must add that looking back into our past does not mean that we can choose to become as we were before we invented agriculture, before we domesticated animals and each other. But there were qualities that those long ago ancestors of ours had that we have discarded, forgotten... We need those qualities.

Many years ago I heard a very civilized Britisher talk about “the quaint customs of quaint people,” a clever saying that expressed well his contempt of anything not modern, not British. There was obviously little to be learned from people so quaint and so distant from modern civilization, he implied. For most of us, what little we know of ancient people, is often no more than a source of inspiration for our fashions. We copy their hair styles, body ornaments, tattoos. Naked savages are pictures in a coffee table book. We steal the herbs they have used for thousands of years in order to make profitable chemical concoctions. We stole their land, and we steal their religions, as a Native American said not long ago, commenting on the proliferation of weekend workshops teaching ‘the wisdom of the elders’.

Another book I received is *Spirit of the Rainforest*, with the sub-title, a Yanomamö shaman’s story, by Mark Andrew Ritchie. This book has a warning pasted on the cover: This book has violent content that may not be appropriate for young or sensitive readers. See inside warning for details. The warning does not lie!

It is the story of the Yanomamö, an ancient tribe of Amazonian Indians, famous today for their use of ayahuasca, one of the newly rediscovered psychedelic plants (actually a mixture of two plants). Supposedly this book is told by a local shaman (as told to Ritchie). The old ways as described here are not ‘pleasant’ to read about, to say the least and the new ways, when all is said and done, are not any better. The Yanomamö described here are in the territory ruled by Venezuela, others of the same tribe are in Brazil (of course modern borders mean nothing to a tribe that was, as all aboriginal peoples, nomadic and wandered all over the rain forest, ignorant of lines cartographers drew on something as abstract as a ‘map’.

It was good to read this if only be reminded again that primitive man did not live in paradise. Yet they had learned to cope with the diseases that were part of their lives, they were skilled hunters, they had a strong sense of identity, ...they survived. With the coming of the white man they acquired new diseases they had no treatments for, and obviously they wanted the goods the white man had in such abundance. According to this book they also wanted the Great Spirit that obviously served the white man. This great spirit eventually made them stop the endless revenge, fights, murders that had characterized their lives (it is beginning to sound like a missionary tract). But of course this new spirit also brought all our much more effective ways to fight and murder.

Today the latest threat to their survival comes because gold is found in the Amazon basin, gold that attracts a different kind of white man, gold that is mined with mercury now severely poisoning waterways and ground water everywhere. It is a gruesome and sad story without much that is uplifting. The description of the present chaos feels all too real.

To quote 'Jungleman', the Yanomamö story teller: We have a split in the head since we first visited the (white men). At first we want to be like them. Then after we watch them for a while, we don't... But one thing we know, (white men) can make things. We all want the things they make. But they make such a split in the head too. Some tell us to throw our spirits away. Some tell us to keep our spirits. They might be able to make things—but they don't think very good.

The ending of this book is unexpected. Jungleman converts to Christianity, and learns that all white man are not saints, but the white man's God makes him feel happy.

The writer (who says he simply writes Jungleman's words) adds many pages defending his efforts against anthropologists who have written widely differing accounts of the Yanomamö, painting a very different picture. They describe the Yanomamö as a lost tribe—lost as many others, all over the world—, lost between their own ancient culture and the seductions of the West.

As I was reading *Spirit of the Rainforest* I was struck again and again with the similarities between the gruesome revenge wars, rape and rage of the Yanomamö and the wars and rapine that are the substance of the history of our civilization. The difference is one of scale. Our wars are on an ever wider scale, whereas the Yanomamö fight neighboring villages and, apparently did not kill so indiscriminately that it threatened their survival.

It remains to be seen how long our civilization can last. Jungleman says (before the end of the book) 'the difference is that white men have things'.

More uplifting, and also told from the point of view of the indigenous people described is 'Toltecs of the New Millennium', by Victor Sanchez. A wonderfully straightforward, simply told story about people who, although they do not call themselves Toltecs, are their descendants, and have the ancient knowledge.

Note: Victor Sanchez makes clear that the people he writes about do not want to be found, studied, photographed, taped. They have preserved much of the ancient ways of life by rejecting the 'things' we offer. The author protects their identity. Let me quote the author's words (translated from the Spanish): "The Toltecs were not a warrior people in the classic sense of the word, meaning they were not dedicated to wars of conquest or similar matters. The Toltecs were a people who held the old knowledge in high esteem. Among them the culture of "flower and song" reached its highest expression. They were warriors of the Spirit. The Aztecs called the arts and sciences *Toltecayotl*" (Toltequity), and the person of knowledge was "Toltec", the sage.

So that 'Toltecs' in this context does not necessarily refer to people living in Central America, descendants of Aztecs, but rather to those of us who can, do and want to acquire the true and ancient knowledge of the Spirit: 'sages'.

Sanchez writes that humans have a universal 'intuition' of the Great Spirit, called by different names by different people at different times in history.

Of course Spirit is not hard to find, it is everywhere: every part of the existing world is nothing other than the visible face of Spirit, but people—blinded by their feelings of importance—have lost the awareness of their relation with the Spirit and therefore feel themselves to be separate from everything, aspiring even to be above everything.

It cannot be said more simply:

Nature is the visible face of the Spirit.



This is why many 'Men of Knowledge/ have had as teachers a ravine, a mountain, or a tree, while others have become apprentices of a wolf or a deer...

I love the writing. It is simple, without unnecessary explanations, not a hint of apology or trying to appeal to western readers. It is a way of writing we have lost in the West, because we always feel we have to explain 'spiritual' things in terms of science, or make Spirit believable for unbelieving people. This book reminds me, again, that the truth is simple, it speaks to us directly.

How simple it is: Nature is the visible face of the Spirit...

This book will definitely find a place in my book case—always bulging so that I have to do a 'purge' every now and then, and books that I know I shall not need to read again are passed on to friends, or to a second hand book store.

Nature is the visible face of the Spirit.

Finally a book I have been reading now for over a month, 'Guns, Germs, and Steel, The Fates of Human Societies', by Jared Diamond. This is a big book, a clever book, a book so full of facts and figures that is hard to find the Spirit. The author is solidly grounded in modern science and has no need for spirit, he knows only measurable, quantifiable facts.

The premise of the book is simple. Dr. Diamond worked in Papua/New Guinea for many years. One of his Papuan friends asked, "Why is it that white people are the only ones who have 'things'?" (all our western things are called 'cargo' in New Guinea, from the planeloads of cargo that we brought to New Guinea during World War II and after the war it was cheaper to leave things than to ship them back). Or, why is it that Papuans need what white people have, but we do not need what they have. Diamond recognizes that the Papuans he knows are certainly as intelligent as we are, yet why is it that their intelligence has not been applied to 'steel and guns'?

The answers to such questions are many and varied, of course. The book deals with all aspects of modern science, particularly the life sciences, history, genetics, molecular biology, climatology, etc. It is written for intelligent lay people in the West. Reading it gives one a taste of the headlong race for ever more sophisticated measurements of observable phenomena that obsesses modern science which then spawns technology from some of what we learn.

This book is important, I imagine, because it answers with all the weight of modern science(s) the usual racist answers to the basic question, "white people became the most advanced in all sciences and so conquered the world because they were inherently superior to other races". To Diamond it is not because white people are inherently superior, but because they 'happened to be' in the right place at the right time to make use of natural advantages.

The 'germs' in the title refer to his observation that white people were lucky because they invented antibiotics early, thus gaining an early advantage over others. Now, of course, this technology is spread over much of the world, although now it is becoming less effective because all germs adapt to the weapons wielded against them

The underlying (but never mentioned) assumption of course is that the things we made the world crave, are 'good', or at least 'better' than what people had before. If what people knew and did was enough to assure their survival, modern science and its things assures not only survival but immensely increased numbers surviving. And we accept that is good.

Is it?

Is it 'better' that there are now six billion people on earth, and a few decennia from now there will be ten billion? Is it better that now more than half the population of the earth lives in enormous cities, in a new kind of appalling poverty, never imagined when humans were primitive?

This book leaves me up in the air, it gives complex and large answers to little questions, but it never addresses what to me are the 'real' questions. Is it 'superior' to be able to destroy the earth? Is it superior to be able to eradicate all other cultures? Is it superior to destroy most of 'the Wild'?

Yes, we have more 'cargo' (we are suffocating in it), but does that makes us 'superior'? Is it even necessary to have the things we have? Is it not true that manufacturing 'steel and guns' uses and uses up resources of the globe which we should, ought, must share with others. In other words, are we not stealing from others, and certainly from our children?

What I find missing in this book, and many like it, is Spirit. In the modern view all of nature has become a resource, to be studied and exploited. We no longer see that nature is the face of Spirit, and so we no longer know Spirit.

But, since we—at least some of us—still have that 'intuition of Spirit', we create a spirit in our image, somewhere 'up there'. Different peoples imagined different spirits, and so we fight. Protestants and Catholics fight in Northern Ireland. Moslems and Christians fight, Moslems and Jews fight. Christians and Jews fight. Missionaries from all faiths go out to 'save the souls' of those who do not as yet believe in their particular spirits.

Sanchez, in *Toltecs of the New Millennium*, says, those who see the spirit in all of nature do not fight, because that spirit is there for all to see, Seeing the spirit in nature is not a matter of belief, but of knowing, that inner knowing that we, in the west, so religiously suppress.

Yes, there are things I need and things that make my life more convenient, but when I start to make a list of the things I really need, I immediately discover that most of those things are needed because I live in a modern society. The first thing I need, for instance, is money to buy the things I need. In order to get money, I need to work (or have worked, in my case). And the kind of work that pays money exists only within the context of this society.



At this stage in my life I write; I have done many other things at other times. I have lived a long time, in many different places, I have known many different people who have given me many interesting and, I think, valuable ideas. I want to share what I have learned.

Strange at it may seem to modern man, keeping up with what is going on in our lives is much more difficult than it was for primitives. Today we live with stresses and pressures unknown before we became 'civilized'. We work harder than primitive man, but most of all our heads are fuller with thoughts. We no longer live in small groups of friends and relatives, we no longer live in a world that is knowable. Our world is not just the physical world (we largely ignore that) but a man-made world that knows no boundaries.

One of the latest developments of this man-made world is that because of the technological miracles of global postal and telephone services it is easier for me to reach a few people here and there, scattered around the world, than it is to reach my neighbors. An example, I think, of

the tendency to form small 'affinity groups' in a sort of imaginary 'community', rather than live with people in a small community. Modern man is desperately seeking for a sense of community—one of the many things that we left by the wayside as we blindly followed 'progress'. The community we find in so-called cyberspace is but the latest expression of our need.

Often I feel as if my efforts to share what I have learned are not enough. I believe (no, I 'know') that we, all of us, are on the wrong track...

That is most difficult for people to accept. How can we be 'wrong' when so obviously we have made enormous strides in understanding the physical universe, when we have such visible achievements to be proud of.

I often feel like the little boy who was the only one who saw (or the only one, at least, who dared speak up!) that the Emperor has no clothes. What are these enormous achievements? We can and do dig out the metals and minerals and oil of this globe, and make things out of them. We can change and have changed the face of the earth. With an enormous expenditure of energy we have sent machines up in space to allow us a closer look at the moon and the planets of our solar system. We are now more than 6 billion, and rapidly increasing. This enormous number of humans is pushing enormous numbers of other species off the face of the earth, no room for plants and animals we have no use for. We have invented words, and writing and printing, and we continue to produce enormous heaps of reading material for which we need mega-tons of paper, made from trees cut from millions of square miles of virgin forest.

Yes, we have automobiles, and planes and boats that get fancier and faster. Many of us have the wealth and the leisure to travel all over the world, introducing our way of life, which always and inevitably has led to the eradication of thousands of rich human cultures.

For most of us that world of excess is all we know. That rich world of things, of power and guns is the context of our lives, making us feel more and more powerless. That world gives us not only things, but an avalanche of techniques to make ourselves over, to change how we look, how we act and react, how we feel. Of course, all of it for money.

I look at the rain, falling today in a steady drizzle. I can almost feel the plants gorging themselves on life-giving water. It has rained more than enough these last few weeks, with days of beautiful sunshine in between days of wet. The grass has not grown much yet, which I think means that the roots dried up in the drought. But the moss has come back green and thick. Perhaps that means now there will be even more moss and other ground cover than before. I like that. The 'ohi'a trees all around are sprouting new leaves, some of them are blooming, showing off their bright red pompoms. There are still a few sprays of orchids, now getting water spots. They managed the dry weather better than I had expected. I have a hanging pot with lobelia that is in full bloom again; the third year for a plant that is an annual elsewhere.

I see and feel the Spirit in all of nature. I feel very deep inside me the spirit of rain, of sun, of thunder and lightning. I talk with the spirits of plants. And sometimes they answer. When nights are clear and I try to sense the spirit of the stars

they seem too far to comprehend. But the immensity of the night skies, taken together, is Spirit as well. When it is very windy I understand that the wind helps clean the branches of trees and plants of dead leaves. Leaves fly and then fall, recycling nourishment into the earth. The earth here is full of earth worms that help convert dead leaves and other 'debris' into fertile soil.

Even though here at this latitude (19° north of the equator) there is no winter with snow and ice, it is definitely Spring. Plants make new leaves all the time, but at this time of year they renew themselves from top to bottom. I can feel the power of that renewal, the life force—‘mana’ as the Hawaiians say. This little piece of land, with its rich variety of trees and plants, nourishes me. Not only the few plants that I eat, but all the plants share their mana with me, as I share my love with them.

These things are important, these things are lasting from the perspective of a human lifetime they are ‘forever’. That is really all that I can share with my friends. Nature is the face of Spirit.

I worry that in the near future there may not be any more ‘nature’ because we, humans, have little use for the mana of the world, all we see is nature as a stage, the beauty of a sunset, or nature as a store house of ‘resources’ which we feel we own and therefore can use and use up. Brave New World, as Aldous Huxley called it, a world of plastics, artificial humans, artificial everything. A world where reason, logic and things have replaced Life.

With a growing number of others I believe (no, I ‘know’) that what I see happening in the near future is no imagination, it is all too real. We, all of us, must stop this madness. We must wake up. Look around, do you see Spirit? There is no Spirit in malls, in concrete highways, in the latest cars, in bigger airplanes, faster computers, mass produced books and television for the masses. There is certainly no Spirit in armies, in guns and steel...

There was Spirit in the lives of the simplest people. Not in a form that westerners understand, but to primitive man his entire world was spirit. Probably there is still Spirit in the poorest among us, because it is things that destroy Spirit.

‘Back to Nature’ is not a romantic ideal, it is our only hope, it is survival. Back to Nature to me means knowing the Spirit in Nature.



Lighten up, I hear you say. Surely, we were not that bad when we explored and conquered the world. We brought modern medicine, schools, electric lights, refrigerators, antibiotics, and nylon, and bureaucracy. We brought democracy to cannibals. Oh yes, and intensive agriculture that destroys the soil and we brought new diseases and crime they never knew before. We stole their land and the riches under their soils. We destroyed their culture by convincing them that it was worthless.

Yes, people live longer, and therefore there are enormously more of us. We introduced money and a new kind of slavery and we brought a society where up to 40% of people are not needed in the processes that keep modern societies going. Some countries are rich enough to support ‘the poor’, most are not.

No, I am not exaggerating. If anything it is worse.

In Thom Hartmann’s book I found a little story about how to cook lobster. Lobsters are usually prepared by throwing them live into boiling water. But there is another way as well: put a lobster in cold water, and gradually heat the water to boiling. The lobster will not thrash around in pain, and as the water warms it will fall asleep. The lobster is cooked while he is asleep. Unfortunately lobster aficionados say that lobster meat cooked gradually does not taste as well.

Thom Hartmann makes the point that humankind today is like the lobster being slowly cooked.

We do not believe the water is warming, we feel comfortable, we have more food than we can eat many of us have large incomes and can afford to buy the latest of everything, all is well with the world... I hear you say, "don't scare me with that 'doom and gloom' talk! Have fun!"

A few of us are aware that the water is heating up.

Three quarters of a century of living have given me an understanding of the immense changes that have and are taking place.

Is it too late to turn the heat off before we die in our sleep?

23 April 1998

## #17

One of the delights of this newsletter is that I frequently get feedback, even from people not on the mailing list, who read an issue someone else sent them. Some people say they were stimulated, others comment about a specific story. I try to answer every letter (sometimes just a word or two). I would like to share some of the comments and observations I have received recently.

Quite a few people responded to the story about a dream in which I was 'lost'. An amazing number of people wrote to say they have had (or are still having) similar dreams! A few of you even included detailed descriptions of your 'lost' dreams. Usually the 'meaning' of a dream is very personal, a dream means something only to or for the dreamer. That does not necessarily mean that dreams always come from the dreamer's subconscious. I believe, and I have strong personal evidence to support that dreams sometimes tell me something I could not have known. I have learned things in dreams that later turned out to be 'true'.

And when many people have similar dreams, it may be that these dreams come from the same place: perhaps from the collective subconscious, when we dream an archetype, or, as in this case, the meaning of the 'lost' dream may have to do with the times we live in. I believe that many people, certainly westerners, are indeed 'lost'. There are other signs that show that people are affected— whether they acknowledge it or not—by the strange and accelerating happenings on this globe. We are accustomed to think in terms of cause and effect. And when the effect is some strange behavior, we almost automatically think the cause is personal (motivation) or social (she was abused as a child). But sometimes when effects are felt by everyone, the source may lay outside us.

I see more and more effects that seem 'caused' by the great changes that appear to be world-wide. Today's world is not the same world I was born in. The political map of the world is different than it was half a century ago. But there are more important changes.

By way of explanation, let me briefly describe a series of experiments that were carried out thirty-five years ago, by John B. Calhoun, then with the National Institute of Mental Health. He studied the growth (and decline) of societies. And, as all scientists, he studied mice. He constructed what we now would call habitats, large cages, cubes 10 X 10 X 10 ft. These habitats had platforms and walkways and plenty of straw, familiar and pleasant possibilities for mice societies. He provided unlimited food and water. Mice, Calhoun found, have social behaviors. They form breeding pairs, female mice take care of offspring. There soon grew a social order, some mice had a higher status than others. All the things one would expect.

Then, something unusual happened (because the setup was unusual and unnatural). As the population of mice kept increasing, social behavior broke down. Mice began to attack each other for no apparent reason, females no longer took care of their young, males showed 'inappropriate' sexual aggressive behavior and tail biting. Behaviors rarely seen in wild mice.

The social dissolution and behaviors Calhoun called 'behavioral sink' were a consequence of gross overpopulation, brought about by absence of normal environmental feedback.

It is difficult not to think about the world today, with an ever increasing human population, increasing at a rate that continues to increase, without remembering the perverse and deteriorating mouse societies in the Calhoun experiments.

Recently I attended a high school graduation in a large hall. It was very crowded, many people had to stand. The first thing I observed was that most of the people standing were old, the people sitting were young. The second observation was more frightening. From the point of view of an old man these people did not behave as I expected them to behave at an occasion that was joyful but also solemn: where even a few years ago people would have applauded, now people screamed at the top of their lungs and screamed and screamed and screamed. It sounded, no it felt, totally out of control!

When I listen to television news it seems that many people are 'lost', seriously unbalanced. In America we have a saying, 's/he loses it', which means something like 'not being able to deal with a situation or feeling any more'. That may be the explanation for those strange random shootings we hear about.

Young people tell me they pierce and mark themselves in the most unlikely places because they are recreating a tribe. I recognize the need to escape a monstrous civilization, but tattoos and piercings are an inappropriate response to an understandable need. When I grew up Indonesians had a word for out of control behavior: amok. The word has moved into American English and perhaps other languages as well (in American English it is usually spelled amuck). Amok is the word for uncontrolled behavior, and also for the person who has 'lost it', a person who was so (temporarily) unbalanced that he was not aware of what he was doing! The person who ran amok would pick up a 'parang', a machete, and slash around him at random. It was wise, we knew, not to get too close to someone who was running amok. Usually no attempts were made to capture the person, or even to restrain him (usually a male), because sooner or later he would tire and then he could be approached more safely. In the Indonesian culture it was not an acceptable behavior, but 'he could not help himself'. Fortunately, amoks were quite rare. I can only remember one incident of a person who had run amok in our town; I never witnessed it. In the 1930s it was a favorite phenomenon for observation and speculation by anthropologists.

Perhaps running amok is similar to what we hear about when suddenly, seemingly without 'reason', someone takes a gun (the modern equivalent of a parang) and starts shooting, not necessarily aiming at anyone, just shooting at random at people in a fast food restaurant, a school, on the street. The difference is that in the cultures of Southeast Asia of half a century ago, amok was not seen as a crime. The people who had run amok, may eventually have ended up, briefly, in jail or in hospital, but amok was thought of as something people do, they cannot help themselves.

Today, at least in this country, 'losing it' is a crime, as all deviant behaviors are crimes. In western amok cases the experts frantically search for a motive. Why did he do it, we want to know? In countries of Southeast Asia people shrugged their shoulders, 'there is no reason, just amok'. In America, perhaps more so than in other western countries, we seem to assume that there is a 'norm' for behavior (although that is never spelled out) and any behavior that deviates from that assumed norm is considered criminal, or deviant, and needs to be punished, or, if not punished, then at least treated in a hospital. We are quite confused about what is a disease and what is crime, the two judgments often overlap.

Perhaps cases of running amok, and other strange behaviors are not the consequence of growing up abused, but signs of Calhoun's behavioral sink?

To me the world today is more and more a man-made world, with more and more people

alienated from their source, which after all is nature. The alienation expresses itself in our increasing unease despite supposed wealth and our many technological wonders. Despite (or perhaps because) ever more exciting and fast entertainment people seem to get duller, not caring.

Our need to control leads to being out of control.

By ignoring and overriding natural checks and balances, we are not only destroying our world-wide ecology, but also our own humanity.

That is why, for me it is important that daily I reaffirm my 'center', the place where I am grounded. I struggle to maintain my own connectedness with the natural world and at times that is a struggle! Some people seek their centeredness in a point of view, a belief system. I cannot do that. Belief systems seem to me the ultimate expressions of human alienation from what is. I do not 'believe' in the magic of the natural world. I experience it daily.

I feel lost when I move too far away from that center, when I get too involved with concerns of the world. There are days, weeks even, when for one reason or another I need to deal with problems and concerns that are external to what is my center. I must deal with finances, for instance. Or I must deal with licenses that need to be renewed, fees that must be paid before a certain date, etc. These concerns are not necessarily stressful, but they take an effort, I must concentrate on what I need to do in order not to get into greater difficulties later (I must pay taxes on time). It is then when I feel off center, I feel 'lost' — as I feel lost in a dense crowd of screaming people!

My life is about as simple as one can make it in today's world. I have few real concerns about money (I do not have much, but enough). I have a good place to live, surrounded with a magical garden. My health is reasonably good; I do not think about it much.



I also had feedback from people about the books I discussed. The Victor Sanchez book is a translation from the Spanish. A friend remarked that the Spanish shows through, in sentence construction, for instance. He felt it was hard to read because of that. To me it seems a very straightforward way of telling what is. There are no words one has to look up in a dictionary, no fancy sentence construction. Although it may not be the English we are used to hearing or reading, it seems straightforward and to the point to me.

The title of the book *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunshine* refers of course to the last hours, metaphorically speaking, of oil, which is the energy of sunshine locked into ancient, fossilized plants. Thom Hartmann reminds us, as others have for many years, of the danger of basing our entire civilization on the use of oil. When oil is gone—and sooner or later it will be gone—what then? Yes, but I believe there are other weaknesses in our civilization that may show up long before oil is gone.

One of these weaknesses is the immense increase of the population of humans over the last few hundred years. It is difficult to understand exactly how greatly we have increased in this century. The world on the eve of the year 2000 is an entirely different world, in large measure because there are four times as many of us as there were at the beginning of this century.

In addition we have not sat still, doing nothing, we have feverishly worked to change anything



and everything in sight. Thom Hartmann's discussion about population growth adds an important dimension to this issue. He warns us that this explosive growth is abnormal. The growth of the world's human population is like the growth of tumors. As in cancerous tumors: the increase of our number is out of control.

That is not normal. Human populations, as all other populations, are (were) normally subject to checks and balances. No animal or plant population exists without close and essential ties to its environment. The environment provides feedback which then immediately adjusts population increase, or decrease for that matter.

From the days when I learned demography, the science of populations, I remember the classical example of eagles, rabbits, grass! Rabbits eat grass, eagles eat rabbits. If one year the grass is particularly abundant, rabbits will thrive, making more rabbits. Eagles will catch more rabbits, produce more eagle chicks. The next year when grass growth is normal, there are not enough rabbits for the abundance of eagles. In any ecology everything is related to everything else.

Our whole ecosphere (the living world) is a complex web of inter-related species, maintaining a balance with only minor fluctuations. If the population of rabbits in a certain area grows out of control, eagles will restore the balance. If grass grows out of control, more rabbits will crop the grass.

Obviously this is a simple, and probably a simple-minded example. The inter-relationships in the ecosphere are far more complex. The overall balance, however, has usually been slow to change. As ecologists have shown, the ecosphere always 'tends to acquire and maintain a balance, harmony'.

Humans have broken out of this harmony. Thom Hartmann reminds us in his book that human populations of course used to be subject to the rules of feedback and balance. For a hundred thousand years the world population of humans remained under a million. If the population of a tribe, say, grew beyond the limits of the resources available to them (they ran out of food) the population shrank, If a disease killed a great number of people, almost always fertility increased and the deficit was made up in one generation. And, by the way, before modern times, wars usually did not decrease population as much as we think, because wars were fought by men and it is women who bear the children. The number of men available to help create offspring is, biologically speaking, insignificant. The number of women able to reproduce determines population growth. Demographers know that a disease is a threat to populations when that disease affects women and children.

The wholesale eradication of native peoples—and their cultures—in the last two centuries was the result of the white man's restless and ruthless march across the earth, bringing his diseases with him, diseases that native peoples had no resistance to. Many, many populations were literally decimated in an unbelievably short time. At the time of 'first contact' (what we used to call 'discovery'), in the late eighteenth century, the population of Hawai'i has been estimated conservatively at 400,000 (according to some sources more, perhaps even twice that much). The first census, held less than a hundred years later, showed the number of 'natives' to be less than 50,000. The same kind of figures are known for most of the islands of the Pacific, many countries in Asia, Africa, and the rest of the world. Demographers call these catastrophic changes 'population crashes'.

As we now know, despite these population crashes all over the world, the total population of humans has increased (doubled, tripled, quadrupled) because of advances in public health, better and more food, clean(er) water, and other manipulations of the environment without thought of tomorrow.

Clearly, humans have taken themselves out of the web of species that maintains an overall balance. We have escaped the planet's ecology. We think ourselves above Nature. We pride ourselves that we can grow more food to feed more people. Time will tell whether this is true; there are strong indications that the practice of so-called modern agriculture (almost all of it mono-culture) is ever more dependent

on artificial ways to control pests and diseases. This kind of agriculture destroys soils, and indications are that sooner or later the cost of growing food through modern agriculture will become prohibitive because of its reliance on artificial chemicals.

One of the most bizarre expressions of our escape from the natural balance is the way modern medical science is seeking (and finding) ways to reproduce humans. Obviously, modern medicine has no thought for the problems that come with rapid population growth. Their concern seems to be with making it possible for people to fulfill their private wishes for biological parenthood (at the same time that social services have made adoption almost impossible, wrought with red tape). It is hard to keep up with the many so-called breakthroughs that are announced weekly. Medical scientists can take an ovum and fertilize it outside of the body, implant it back in someone's uterus, not necessarily the woman whose ovum it was. Chemicals suppress rejection of 'foreign' tissue. Soon we will be able to grow humans in an artificial womb, and certainly a doctor (probably more than one) somewhere is working on cloning a human.

Doctors now are working to unravel the DNA, with the expectation that by knowing what each little piece of DNA 'means' they will be able to prevent all diseases, eventually death itself, they say!

**If that is not hubris, what is?** Yes, it is true that our alienation from our place in the world, as part of the world, has resulted in an

unheard of growth of technology, an unheard of increase in population, a never before achieved level of wealth, a startling increase in longevity. And it is also true that the same alienation is causing an unheard of increase in serious damage to our environment and perhaps serious behavioral excesses in people who 'lose it'.

This headline in last Sunday's paper says it well: **Boom and Doom: Countries get richer, earth gets poorer**

Even developing countries are richer than ever. But melting icecaps in the Andes and dried up rivers in China show a world whose pulse is slowing, according to data gathered by environmental researchers. (Associated Press)

Thom Hartmann talks at length about the fact that all of nature strives for a balance. A balance between species, between a species and the environment it relies on for survival, is a dynamic stability. When the balance is disturbed, natural feedback mechanisms restore a balance. The fact that for several hundred years we, humans, have been able to counter the forces that seek to restore a balance—as we chemically prevent rejection of foreign tissue—means that we have amassed great power over nature. We can and do force nature to do our

will.

I cannot help but feel that in the long run (and I think the long run has just about run out) it is impossible to ignore, or override the natural laws of this planet.

It is obvious that few people believe as I do. Many of us would rather not know. And perhaps that too is a sign of Calhoun's behavioral sink!

Modern man expects that Man will sooner or later take over the role of the Creator. In many ways we already have. In this country natural birth has been taken over by the medical profession. Each and every medical 'breakthrough' puts us further away from a natural balance. When it is possible to keep a fetus that weighs less than a pound at birth alive—when it is possible for a woman many years past menopause to carry a fetus to term—when it is almost common place to fertilize ova in a petri dish—all 'normal' checks and balances vanish.

Can you imagine what would happen if doctors would 'cure' death, so that people would live 'forever'? Could we then afford to still have as many children as we might wish, all of whom would also live 'forever'? Who do we think we are? Are humans more important than other Life on earth? Are we more important than the earth itself, our 'mother', from whose substance we grew? Are we so selfish that we can only think of ourselves? What shocking arrogance.

We may think of ourselves as a super species, controlling all of creation. We have been able to harness the most awesome source of energy of this earth, but my guess it that it will be difficult to control the use of this power. We are children playing with fire. We cannot be bothered with consequences.

For instance, there is what is now called 'y2k'. Y2k stand for 'year 2000'. Computers have been around for only a very short time. At first, in the forties, they were developed for war, and similar dark enterprises, but as the technology developed, and particularly when the many different pieces of a computer could be miniaturized (made smaller and smaller), computers came to be used in more and more applications. PCs ('personal computer') are an insignificant part of all the things that now contain computers, and/or computer chips. All modern cars have computers. Banks of course are computerized, as are all of the branches of all levels of government. Telephone and postal services are computerized. Perhaps your toaster has a computer chip in it. And one part of the purpose of almost all computers is to keep track of time. A few years ago, some people realized that almost all computer programs were programmed with only six spaces for date: month (05, May), day (18) and year (98). When the century changes, computers will read 01/01/00. And to a computer 00 can only mean 00 (meaningless) or 1900 not 2000. On Jan 1, 2000 your auto computer may think that your car has not been serviced since January 1, 1900 and scream at you to get it serviced! Computers in banks see 00 — and when computers are confronted with 'impossible' information they crash. Nobody knows for sure what disasters may happen, although some who know computers expect the worst.

It is not difficult to change a computer program, but it is a lot of work, particularly when, as in this case, the little bit of code is hidden deep within a program. All programs are updated, given new features, added to, made bigger and better, but something as insignificant as the date is left untouched from previous versions. I have been told that it is only since 1996 that programmers have become aware that y2k is a problem, and that something needs to be done about it. Hopefully most programs after 1996 are 'y2k compliant'. But older computers (even

personal computers—except Macintosh, which will sail over that imaginary bump in time without a hitch—may crash when the date turns.

Eighteen months from now the number of the century changes. Some people predict that important aspects of our civilization will come to a halt, or break down, causing utter chaos in banks, governments, international currency, but also in insurance companies, doctors offices and hospitals. We already know that it will cost the world many billions (or trillions) of dollars to fix all programs and replace chips that contain that bit of code. The task of re-writing (after first finding!) that tiny piece of code, or replacing chips, is truly enormous, more enormous because nobody really knows the extent of the problem.

Y2k is obviously a problem that could have been foreseen 30 years ago (within the lifetime of the people who programmed computers then). It is certainly a problem that could have been tackled ten years

ago, instead of now at the last moment. It tells us that we, humans, may be smart, but we have the minds of adolescents. We are too busy making money to look ahead. We surge ahead, smashing and destroying as we go along, inventing medical wonders that we have no time to test, building computers that will not work tomorrow.

If I am around to ring in the year 2000, I plan to have supplies stored for at least two weeks, enough gasoline to get me around for a little while. Candles. I hope my water tank will be full. I shall want to have a few hundred dollars in cash. Just in case... Welcome to the 21st century.

18 May 1998

## #18

Summer is here, a warmer season. It rains almost as much as in winter, but we also have sunny hours, even sunny days. I am spending most of my days outside, being nurtured by the peace and quiet.

It is not always quiet of course. The other day some very large trucks were in the neighborhood trimming branches along the one-lane unpaved or barely paved roads in this cul-de-sac. When I asked why, the men did not know. All they knew was that their tree-cutting business had been hired by the telephone company to 'trim along the road'.

"I guess they are planning to string some new lines," the foreman said.

Only a few days earlier I had listened to a tape, *The Mayan Factor, Path Beyond Technology*, by Jose Argüelles. Fascinating stuff. Argüelles talks about his life long study of the Mayan Calendar which, according to him, is not really a calendar but a whole new way to see 'reality'. And as the monstrous trucks were noising their way around tight corners I smiled when I remembered Jose Argüelles' words that after the end of this period (A.D. 2012) 'technology will no longer be necessary'! Can you imagine that?

I have often had similar ideas, although I never studied the Mayans. I remember the first time I watched the take-off of a space rocket, perhaps one of those going to the moon with a few people strapped in the nose of the missile. I knew what I was supposed to think: "Wow, how clever is Man that he can do this." But in fact all I could think was, What a gargantuan effort to achieve so little. I sensed the bulk of that metal canister as it slowly, painfully slowly, lifted off using enough energy to light a city, with clouds of steam and noise enough to break windows 10 miles away. Surely, I thought, there must be simpler ways to get someone to the moon. What do we want on the moon?

That memory came back as I heard and saw the tree cutters use many hundreds of horsepower to cut a branch here and there. There were three huge trucks, two of them so large that it took them five minutes to turn a corner on our narrow roads, roaring their engines, belching blue smoke. All that machinery and a half dozen brawny men to cut a few branches. As almost everything of our wonderful twentieth century technology, this too was gross overkill!

Jose Argüelles, *The Mayan Factor* says: "This is space ship earth, and what we have done, at this point, we have virtually used up all the planet's reserve energy sources (oil). If we say, Yes, but we have another 40 years, that is not looking forward very much. We should not use any more of the reserve energy stores. This is an organic space ship, certain energy sources have grown over time. When you need them you draw on them, but you do not deplete them. "We have depleted the space ship earth's reserve resources in one big technological binge. So the path beyond technology is actually a necessary path. And while we have depleted the reserve energy source of the earth we have also succumbed to a one-dimensional view of reality at the same time, and in this one dimensional view we can say that the circuits of our belief systems have become turned upside down, the mainstream mass mind set, the use of chemicals that produce incredible pollution is assumed 'superior' to the sun... In this technological binge we have become incredibly intoxicated, 'amnesiac' , and with our belief circuits upside down, we believe that dark is better than light... What matters is that we get sober, that we wake up. We live in a world in which the human consciousness is a function of what can be called 'mass mind',

controlled and manipulated and believing in governments and the whole range of institutions that are the key factors in modern life, and the mass media continuously puts out information that basically is negative information... the governments and institutions support

this creation of negativity for the mass mind, so, basically, we are human beings in the grip of a very bad type of cultural hypnosis, or a civilizational trance, so what matters is that we wake up so that we can enjoy... “We have created a dangerous imbalance through our technological binge, and pollution. What happens when we wake up is that we can enjoy, and that we see that technology cannot help us. “If we don’t wake up, the planet will naturally self-destruct because it is already so far out of balance.”

(My apologies: I am not good at transcribing from tape, I do not guarantee the perfection of the above. I hope it reflects Argüelles’ meaning accurately)

Certainly I like technology, but to me it seems that technology must be proportionate to what it is designed to do. A knife is wonderful technology, baskets and boxes to transport and store things are amazingly wonderful technology. Can you imagine life without bottles or pans? Bicycles are great inventions. Time keeping devices? Now that they have become miniaturized and almost invisible, and they work well and smoothly, they are tolerable. But do we really want (need) to be slaves to clock time? There are numerous devices designed to make our life easier, but before we know what happened, it is we who are forced to change our lives to make the device work better. It was a clever idea to invent a machine that moves us from here to there, without having to feed and occasionally saddle a horse to ride. But it forced us to accommodate the entire world to cars.

It seems obvious enough that a new invention might well create a new industry, and it seems equally obvious that with automobiles we would want more roads, or certainly better roads and fuel and mechanics to keep the automobiles running, and hundreds of laws to make driving safer, police to control speed, and huge factories all over the world to make the vehicles we ‘need’ to get to work. And a big new industry requires expensive advertising to convince us to buy this car rather than another. In only one century cars have changed our lives, cars have changed the face of the earth. Where and how we live today is a consequence of cars. And another consequence, at least in this country, is the almost elimination of most forms of public transportation.

Now that we have so heavily invested in cars it is just about impossible to even think about whether cars are really the most efficient way to move people from here to there. Almost certainly they are not, quite apart from the fact that they still are one of the great contributors to the toxic quality of the air we must breathe. But even if we knew that ‘fixed rail’ transportation is more efficient and much less expensive, we still could not easily shift gears. Despite our confession of wanting change, we need that change to be dished up in ‘improvements’, this year’s mode, square headlights instead of round ones. Not having a car? Impossible!

We all know that oil is a vanishing resource, yet it seems almost impossible to invent a better motive power because it costs a great deal of money to explore new energy sources — and of course the manufacturers of automobiles do not want to have to reinvent the gasoline engine. Today you can buy an electric car, or a ‘mixed energy’ car (with a gasoline motor that runs only to charge the batteries for the electricity that drives the wheels) — but such cars cost more

than twice what an ordinary car costs, and they have less 'power', which we all demand (why? to drive faster than is legal?). Do we need two or more hundred horsepower engines, with the latest gadgets and gimmicks to move one person to work and back, and on weekends a family of two adults and two children, from here to Disneyland?

What is even worse is that an industry, and so the economy, follows (or creates?) fads. Today the 'in' vehicle to drive is a Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV), originally a large boxy car built on a truck chassis. Tests

show that despite their great weight and girth they are less safe to drive, they cause more accidents than ordinary cars (although their passengers might survive better because of the mass of the SUVs). It goes without saying that larger and heavier cars (less streamlined, less refined) also use a lot more oil-derived fuel. They are also more expensive to buy. In a world that is overpopulated, with a known limit on oil, with concerns about pollution of the air, these new cars are obviously counter-indicated. But you cannot argue with success, they say; SUV's sell.

And why do we live in square houses? Because building technology insists that square corners are easier to build and therefore cheaper.

Why is it that when I buy food in even a modestly sized market, I must buy pre-packaged food in quantities that are more than I can use in a week? I like broccoli, but why do I have to buy a one pound package? Today I go out of my way to shop only in markets where I can buy one piece of broccoli, which is fine for a few meals. Why do I have to buy a dozen eggs when I eat one or at most two a week?

Why do telephone wires have to be strung in a straight line? There are no straight lines in nature; nor are there perfect circles, of course. Nature works with organic lines and forms, in nature things grow. One would think that flexible telephone lines could easily be strung around trees but our civilization accepts without comment that trees must be cut so that telephone lines can be strung in straight lines. Why?

Why do foot paths need to be straight? Because an architect thinks it looks better. Many years ago I had an office on a university campus. At that time universities were constantly expanding. Each new -ology had to have its own department, and eventually its own building. So they had to build buildings in the empty spaces between buildings. During the time when a building was constructed students walked around the sites and created paths that followed the contour of the land, elegantly curving around a tree. As soon as the building was finished, however, new paths were laid out. Of course students continued to follow their own paths. Until the powers that be put signs up, then barriers, levied fines, and did everything they could to force people to follow the straight, square cornered concrete paths, rather than the natural paths that had 'grown' so to speak. Sad to say, those who plan these things won. Eventually we all (almost all) follow the paths that governments declare legal. We have become slaves of our technologies, and slaves of our civilization.

I rebel—Stop! Can we not think any more?



A few weeks ago our local Sunday paper had a headline that will make all of us feel better:

**El Nino's damage not especially costly.**

The sub-title reads ) **Winter of 1997-98 no pricier than those in previous years** The article measured the severity of winter by the amount of money FEMA had committed as of last Wednesday. 'More than \$289 million for this last winter's disasters, against \$294m the winter before, and \$280m the winter before that.

FEMA is the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the arm of the Federal Government that provides low interest loans to people who live in areas that are designated 'disaster' areas by their respective State Governors, and then by the Federal Government. I wonder whether 'committed' means paid out?

And I cannot see much difference between \$289 million and \$294 million—do those figures really have anything to do with the severity of storms?

Nowadays we call these kinds of statistics 'information'. Nobody really knows what these statistics mean. Let's face it, they mean nothing at all, except to people who like to play with numbers. To the individuals whose houses were destroyed, who lost all their possessions in a tornado, whose property was washed away, I am sure it makes no sense whatsoever to compare one disastrous winter with another.



Earlier this year we had a very unusual drought on this island, more recently we had days and days of rain. Now I appreciate our sunny days that much more. Today was one of those magic days, quiet, peaceful. Occasionally a dog in the neighborhood barked, chickens chuckled. I also heard another noise as of bees, a sort of buzzing that swelled and faded; it was only in the afternoon that I finally realized that buzzing was the noise of tires on the highway, a few miles from here. There must be many tourists on their way to see the volcano this weekend. I had to be outside all day (not good for my skin, a doctor told me, but if I am happy that must be good for my skin, no?).

I did what I call gardening. I am torn when I think of 'gardening' because my most inner being does not want to tread with heavy feet on this landscape. I want to leave it as wild as possible, and yet, of course, I mow the grass (less all the time, because if you do not mow it, I discovered, interesting ground covers and mosses get a chance to establish). Today I mostly trimmed leaves from the tree ferns. They are growing immensely, daily I am discovering new curls uncurling, unfolding in that tender light green that looks so vulnerable. Eventually, slowly, the leaves of tree ferns get hard and brittle. After light green they turn many colors of darker green, and then a metallic sort of silver or gold or bronze. But finally they shrivel and turn black. Not all at once, but slowly, as everything about tree ferns is slowly. Then, when half a leaf is already black I feel I can cut it off. I can tell when it is ready to be cleaned up: when those huge leaves finally die their stems are hollow and dry, the stem tough and wooden. When the stem is still full of sap I know that it is too early to cut that leaf.

I made two more chicken wire composters for all the tree fern material that I cut. It takes a while to disintegrate. It depends on how small I cut the leaves, it may take from six months to a year, but it makes excellent mulch.

I walk around a lot. I talk with plants and spend time getting to know plants I have walked by



before. Today the thought came to me that in a little hollow, near where I sit (a friend calls it my 'bower') something white might look good. I wondered what white leaved or white flowered plant would like it there. I spend much time thinking about what might want to be in a certain spot, and when I bring in a new plant (I do not often buy plants, usually I find them in the woods near here, or someone gives me a plant or a cutting) I walk around for many hours before it 'clicks': Yes, here is where this plant would feel at home. After planting it I watch closely for a few days, and if it does not feel right, I move it while it is still healthy and ready to root in a new place.

Yes, I grow edibles. But they too are put where I think they would like to be. There are sweet potato growing between other plants, sending out runners far away. Spinach grows in the shade of a big tree. Strawberries do well on top of one of the two big lava bubbles, between some impatiens, an azalea bush, and an arugula plant.

And everywhere is near another tree fern intertwined with one or more 'ohi'a trees-to-be.

Last month I fell for the idea that I wanted to grow beans and peas. They do well here, I know from past experience. My youngest son, Scott, dug a trench in the grass, then we enriched the soil with some dolomite and chicken manure. He constructed a net, stretched between interesting structures of bamboo and stout rope. It looks fine, but for some reason it does not work. Only a few of the many seeds I planted (some directly in the ground, some after soaking for a few days, some started in little planter cups) came up. Now, a few weeks later there is only one pea plant that has reached about 5 feet, but it does not look very happy. It may well be that there are slugs that eat the tender shoots. I was told to use slug bait, but when I read the label I discovered it is a potent chemical. I cannot do that. So I shall probably abandon the peas and beans project. I still have some seeds so I may try to grow them elsewhere, where they have trees to climb in. Will see.



Found a book when I roamed around the magical vastness of Amazon.com Books on the internet, "My Name is Chellis Glendinning & I'm Recovering from Western Civilization", (by Chellis Glendinning, of course), © 1994, Shambhala Publications, Inc.

The title is supposed to make you think of the many 12-step programs. I have bad associations with these programs. All they seem to do is substitute one addiction for another. But I succumbed when I read the preface of this book: "... You and I are not people who live in communion with the Earth, and yet we are people who evolved over the course of millions of years—through savannah, jungle and woodland—to live in communion with it. We exist instead dislocated from our roots by the psychological, philosophical and technological construction of our civilization, and this alienation leads to our suffering: massive suffering for each of us, and mass suffering throughout our society."

Ms. Glendinning is a psychotherapist, and discusses not only the symptoms of our addiction to this so-called civilization, but also the psychological and sociological dynamics. At times it gets a little technical, but on the whole it is a fascinating and important account: our society has become an addiction! As other addictions, we feel better when we are in it, and thus we cannot do without!



Volcano Village, where I have lived for many years now, is growing. Perhaps a few more people live here the year 'round, but what is more noticeable is that now we have places to eat. Now we have a real coffee shop, two fancy restaurants, and a 'down home' restaurant. The latter is where most of the local people hang out, the coffee shop is where tourists and a few local people go for just a cup of coffee or a sandwich.

The other day I had lunch at the restaurant where my friends and neighbors go and I could not help overhearing a heated discussion about the dangers of eating chicken. It soon became evident that I had not kept up with the news. It seems salmonella and e-coli had been very much in the news. People in America evidently eat great quantities of chickens, and chicken that is just undercooked enough to cause local epidemics of diseases that a few years ago we thought gone. Probably it is almost inevitable that since 'processing' chicken carcasses is done on a scale never before imagined, salmonella and e-coli can occasionally be found in the packaged chickens we buy in supermarkets. Mini epidemics of easily preventable diseases have led to a whole new approach to cleanliness. It is no longer thought safe to just wipe a counter top or a cutting board with a sponge, now all these should be thoroughly scrubbed with lysol and other 'germ killers', we are told.

The same story can be told of modern agriculture, which usually means mono-culture. One kind of plant growing on acres and acres, which may make harvesting easier but brings with it the spread of pests and diseases that proliferate in such a dense single plant area. The farmer (now a corporation) must apply an ever stronger pesticide to kill the particular insect or micro organism that could destroy an enormous crop. Again inevitably a few of these insects and bugs will happen to be more resistant to that pesticide than others of their kind. The resistant kind will multiply. And, equally inevitably, next year there is a stronger pesticide to kill resistant bugs.

This scenario has played and is being played all over the world in this century. All our insecticides have increased in potency about every year, to the delight of pesticide manufacturers. Modern pesticides kill pests, but one effect of this has been that it has become almost impossible to eat vegetables produced in modern agribusinesses without also eating the pesticides, and most of them are poison, some of them deadly.

Many years ago I knew a man who had worked in an apple orchard in New Zealand. He swore he would never eat another apple, after knowing what is put on apple trees before they bear fruit, while the fruit ripens, after the fruit is harvested and just before it is shipped to the market. Altogether 14 different chemicals, I remember.

No wonder more and more of us are allergic to one or more of the thousands of chemicals that we have put in the air, the water, and the soil all around us.

Our human population in this century has achieved hitherto unheard-of densities in monster cities that offer fertile fields for old and new disease-causing organisms. When we lived in small groups we had relatively few diseases. And of the diseases that were around at the time, few could spread very fast, so that humans had more than enough time to develop immunities.

Today in cities with populations of millions, living close together, the possibility of a disease raging through in record time is infinitely greater. Very comparable to a plague of locusts spreading through acres and acres of corn. Our antibiotics get stronger every year, but some

diseases, for instance tuberculosis, are coming back with a new and tougher strain that is resistant to the antibiotics we have today.

Humans have unquestionably conquered the world, we have proven our superiority over all big predators—lions, tigers, crocodiles, snakes. Now it is the smallest organisms that are our only remaining ‘enemies’.

As many people have discovered, it takes a remarkably small plot of land to grow one's own vegetables and some starches. I know people who grow almost all the vegetables they eat (and they eat very well indeed) in flowerpots on their window sills. It is not even very much work, it takes minutes a day to take care of plants. I love growing all of my own vegetables and fruit, not only because I can control what goes into the food I eat, but growing vegetables is one of the nicest ways of getting to feel close to the earth!



From Men At Arms, by Terry Pratchett:

*"Consider Orangutans. In all the worlds graced by their presence, it is suspected that they can talk but choose not to do so in case humans put them to work, possibly in the television industry. In fact they can talk. It's just that they talk in Orangutan. Humans are only capable of listening in Bewilderment."*

19 June 1998

and so it is